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LET THE RIVER BE

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A HISTORY OF THE OZARK'S BUFFALO RIVER

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A HISTORY OF THE OZARK'S BUFFALO RIVER

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SOUTHWEST CULTURAL RESOURCES CENTER

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

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PREFACE

This study began during the summer of 1974 when, as a graduate student, I prepared an inventory of historic buildings along the Buffalo River for the National Park Service. As I attempted to place farms and log cabins in their proper historical context, I discovered that all previous research in the Arkansas Ozarks was either too general or too specific. There was no comprehensive overview that studied the settlement and development of that particular highland valley. What started as a summer adventure, then, evolved into a rather extensive examination of the Buffalo River valley that became my doctoral dissertation.

There is something intriguing about rivers. Americans from Henry David Thoreau to Mark Twain have been drawn to them, have listened to them, have studied them. Rivers served as roads to the interior of the continent during the early periods of the nation's history and later attracted settlers and towns and commerce and industry. The chronicles of the Shenandoah, the Ohio, the Missouri, and the Mississippi are an integral part of the country's historical and cultural past. Their names evoke images of epic movements -- of a romantic period. And for every river of major import literally hundreds of tributaries echo similar stories of exploration and settlement. For every Ohio there was a Wabash; for every Missouri, a Platte; and for every Rio Grande, a Pecos. The Mississippi is fed by the Arkansas which is fed by the White which, in turn, is fed by the Buffalo. Each played a role in the westward movement; each represents a piece of the broad mosaic of western migration.

The story of the Buffalo is essentially one of people, highland people for the most part, and how they and their way of life were affected by the Ozark Plateau, by "outside" influences, and by their relative geographical isolation. Like their counterparts in the southern Appalachians, the inhabitants of the Arkansas Ozarks lived close to the earth in an existence that was distinguished by poor and limited arable soil, by an insularity imposed by the surrounding hills, and by an independence that was necessitated by both.

In the course of compiling a history such as this, one regularly turns to others for assistance, advice, and

*Research during the past ten years, particularly in the field of archeology, required the text of the dissertation to be modified significantly. See "The Buffalo River: From Settlement to National River," Texas Tech University, 1976.

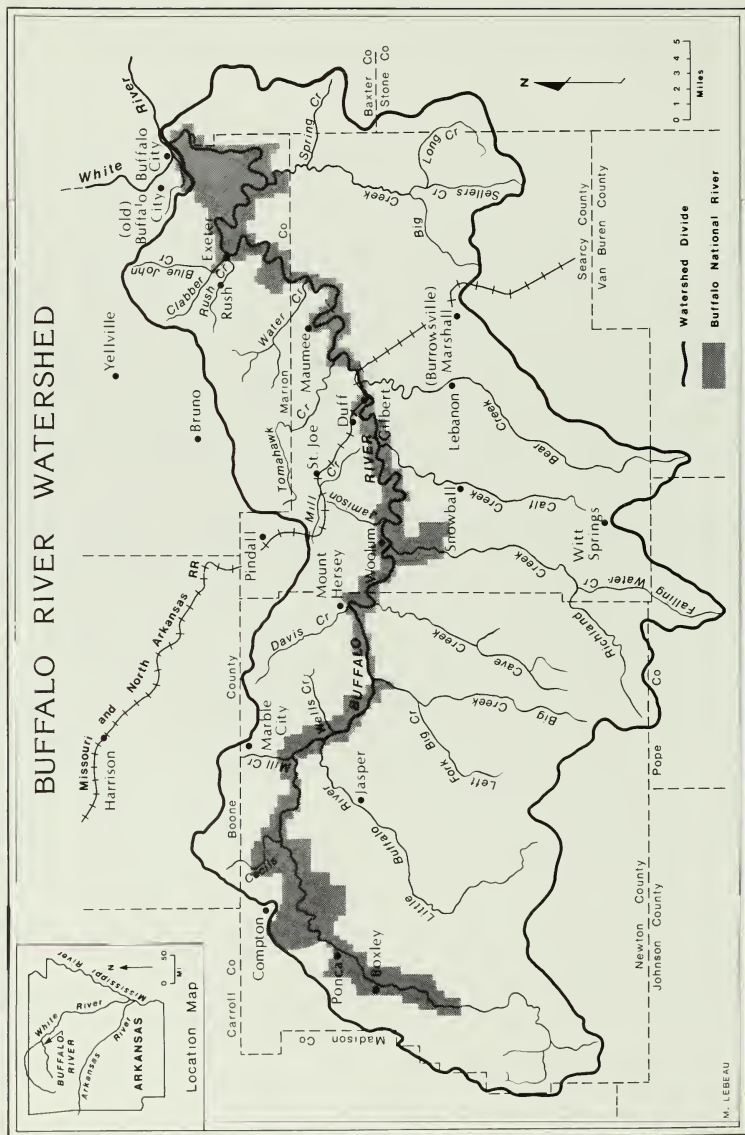
encouragement. I am deeply indebted to Russell Baker and his staff at the Arkansas History Commission and to Samuel Sizer, former Curator of Special Collections and his staff at the University of Arkansas. James J. Johnston shared his enthusiasm for and his extensive knowledge of Searcy County throughout the entire project. Generous help was provided by Daniel Wolfman and George Sabo III of the Arkansas Archeological Survey which led to a major revision of the archeological portion of the original work. Kenneth Smith, whose love for the valley is uncontrollably infectious, gave time and energy. I benefited greatly from his earlier forays into the Buffalo's history and his experience in the battle over the future of the river. The staff of the Buffalo National River offered support and encouragement, and made each visit to the river as enjoyable and profitable as possible. I am grateful to the history faculty at Texas Tech University who offered support and criticism in judicious proportions, and to James W. Kitchen who administered the initial National Park Service contract and who became both Ozark companion and good friend. To S.V. Connor whose advice, humor, and unerring sense of direction guided this research I owe much. For his high standard of historical scholarship I shall be eternally grateful. And finally, I wish to express my appreciation to Sabette, whose patience, understanding, and pertinent observations assisted infinitely in the preparation of this manuscript.

BEGINNINGS: PREHISTORY AND EARLY EXPLORATION

Vance Randolph, the Ozark region folklorist, once met a man who claimed that if Newton County, Arkansas were ever "smoothed out, it would be bigger'n the whole state of Texas."¹ The tale aptly illustrates not only the topographic character of Newton County in particular but also the whole of the southernmost of the Ozark Plateaus, the Boston Mountains. Containing possibly the tallest waterfall between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, this area of northwest Arkansas is a heavily forested land of deep, sharply defined valleys. Flat-topped ridges with vertical lime- and sandstone bluffs separate small creeks and rivers which have, over the centuries, divided the Arkansas highlands into a myriad of narrow valleys and hidden "hollers." It is in western Newton County where the Boston Mountains reach their greatest height of 2,561 and where the one hundred and forty-eight mile long Buffalo River begins its winding, unbroken journey.

Flowing in an easterly direction, the Buffalo leaves the wooded cragginess of the Boston Mountains in the northeastern quarter of Newton County and slices through the more moderate rolling terrain of the Springfield Plateau in Searcy and the southern portion of Marion counties before joining the White River a few miles above Batesville, Arkansas. Its watershed comprises 1,388 square miles (an area slightly larger than the state of Rhode Island), is about seventy miles in length, averages twenty-two miles in width, and constitutes 4.8 percent of the drainage area of the White River.² The Buffalo River is not one of Arkansas' major waterways; it has only occasionally been used for transportation purposes and has never been considered suitable for industrial use. It is regionally and nationally unique because it has never been dammed, and its banks have not been extensively developed. Its human history, however, provides a revealing study of the intimate relationship between people and mountains and the effect the latter can have on the former. For more than a century after being settled, the northwestern highlands of Arkansas hindered both transportation and communication among the inhabitants and encouraged the development of a distinct mountain culture: a culture that continued well into the twentieth century to evoke its nineteenth century origins. As recently as 1955, Vance Randolph could write

In the Ozark Mountains elderly folk still lead simple lives, without any modern gadgets. They are attracted to particular localities, strongly influenced by clan and family backgrounds. The gods of the mountains are



not the gods of the valleys. Hillfolk are not like lowlanders...there is still plenty of time in the backwoods, to sing ballads and tell tales.³

The extent to which the Ozark mountain culture existed, however, depended primarily upon geography. Life in the several county seats certainly differed from life on forty acres up a secluded "holler." The common denominator that linked both was the slower pace of change evident throughout the region. Writing a quarter of a century after Randolph, Milton Rafferty viewed the Ozark phenomenon from a different perspective.

To say that the culture of the Ozarks is changing is a truism, for there is little in the world that doesn't change. However, the rate of change and the process of change from place to place within the Ozarks has been variable, so that much that was still is, much that was is gone, and the remainder, mainly imagery, never existed.⁴

Generalizations and stereotypes are always difficult to substantiate under close examination. What often emerges from such an appraisal is a range of historical realities that cannot be aggregated into a general statement, but within which lie individual truths that bear, to some degree, a relationship to the stereotype. The separation of the general from the specific, the stereotype from the individual histories of the Ozarks, is a major theme in this work. By any measure, the fundamental distinction between what Randolph would term hillfolk and lowlanders begins with the highlands themselves--a series of plateaus and valleys whose character was developed by extensive erosion.

Originally a low inland sea beneath which had collected a thick layer of sedimentary rock, the Ozark Plateau, perhaps sixty million years ago, uplifted to form an asymmetrical dome possibly three to four thousand feet high. Through a series (geologists remain divided regarding the exact number) of erosion and uplift cycles, followed by the extensive activity of numerous streams, the Ozarks attained their present appearance.⁵ The Ozark Plateau is not one homogeneous geological formation, but is divided into four distinct sections. The Missouri portion of the province is dominated by the Salem Plateau, a relatively flat "prairie" region which is broken only adjacent to the major streams where the relief may be as great as 500 feet. The St. Francis Mountains, the smallest of the Ozark regions, comprises 100 square miles of discrete hills within the Salem Plateau. Surrounding the Salem Plateau on the north, west, and south is the Springfield Plateau which resembles the plain-like topography of its neighbor except for the river valleys which dip only 200 to 300 feet below the upland surface.⁶ Forming the precipitous southern boundary of the Ozarks, the Boston Mountains are the

most rugged and spectacular of the entire area.

The geological composition of the Ozark Plateau is principally limestone and dolomite. But while both the Salem and Springfield plateaus consist of this material, the St. Francis Mountains are of volcanic origin and are made up of igneous rock. The Boston Mountain section is composed of, in addition to a limestone foundation, a thick layer of interbedded shales, limestones, and sandstones, and a pronounced cap of Atoka Sandstone. It was the erosion of these top two layers that produced the conspicuous escarpment of this southern area and explains its designation as the Boston Mountains rather than the Boston Plateau.

The limestone which characterizes the Springfield Plateau and the ridge slopes of the Boston Mountains contains a high percent of chert, a flintlike quartz more durable than limestone. Upon weathering, the limestone dissolves into fine soil particles and is carried downward. The undissolved chert remains on top and forms a layer of adamant debris.⁸ As a result, the Buffalo River country became literally a land of rocks which possessed only a small amount of arable land on the more level sandstone uplands and in the small alluvial valleys. The rocky condition of the soil prompted the government surveyors who first platted the region in the early nineteenth century to note in their log books: "Land poor stony and broken," and "Land 2nd rate soil but too stony and broken for cultivation," and "Land most harrassingly [sic] hilly and so rocky that it was with difficulty I could enter my Jacob-staff at any one place, unfit for cultivation."⁹

The combination of early erosion and the more recent extensive weathering by vigorous water courses has led, over the geologic ages, to the formation of a rugged country dominated by narrow valleys restricted by sheer bluffs and prominent ridges in the Boston Mountains which give way to rolling stony "prairies" sharply incised by rivers and streams in the Springfield Plateau. The river valleys are circuitous and have cut deeply into the limestone which borders them. The formation of a high perpendicular bluff on the outside bend of a stream is common throughout the Buffalo River country, while the inside of the curve usually assumes the shape of a gently sloping hillock. Although narrow, the valleys possess rich alluvial soil which, while suitable for agricultural pursuits, is subject to the ravages of devastating flash floods after periods of heavy rainfall. The bluffs and ridges, which are generally too stony and dissected to encourage agricultural production (limited areas have been cleared in recent years for grazing), are covered by a dense deciduous forest. The density of that wooded expanse, when coupled with the highly irregular topography, produced a region which could be penetrated only with great difficulty.

Prehistoric peoples first occupied the Arkansas Ozarks as early as 12,000 years ago. Throughout the following millennia small bands of hunters and gatherers left remnants of their occupation in the rich flood plains, on the ridgetops and upland plateaus, and in the recesses of innumerable bluff shelters.¹⁰ Beginning as small family-sized units, these Ozark peoples slowly began to communicate and trade with other local groups in ever-widening circles. Use of domesticated plants gradually led to more intensive use of the river and stream bottoms between 5,000 and 1,000 years ago. Annual base camps became more permanently established in the valleys during the late prehistoric times, but the bluff shelters continued to be used for habitation as well as for specialized purposes like burials and food storage. Technological changes about A.D. 1 - 500 include a shift from the use of a dart hurled by an atlatl to the extensive use of the bow and arrow. Social relationships among the autonomous groups continued to develop until during the Mississippi Period (about 1,000 to 300 years ago) some of the Ozark dwellers were participating in pan-regional social and ceremonial systems.¹¹

Definitive statements about the original occupants of the southwest Ozarks, however, cannot be made. New research directions within the past several years have caused archeologists to expand their view of who the prehistoric peoples were and how they developed culturally. This recent research is particularly important because the Arkansas Ozarks are no longer viewed as an anomalous cultural manifestation, but as part of a broad regional pattern of cultural development found throughout the Eastern Woodlands. These research directions were initiated by Daniel Wolfman in 1974 and later expanded by George Sabo, et al. in 1982 in reports originally prepared for the National Park Service and the United States Forest Service respectively.¹²

As greater research emphasis is being placed on sites other than the bluff shelters, a more balanced picture of prehistoric occupation is beginning to emerge.¹³ Much, however, remains to be learned. The 1982 plan for the conservation of archeological resources in Arkansas identified numerous topics for future research that would expand existing knowledge of prehistory in the Arkansas Ozarks. Among the research subjects proposed by the Arkansas archeologists were the effect of past environments on human adaptations, the origin of plant domestication in the Ozarks, variability in settlement-subsistence patterns through time and across the Ozarks region, the movement of raw materials into and out of the mountains, and the connection of the Ozarks to cultural developments in surrounding regions.¹⁴ Continuing research and analysis will broaden the present picture of prehistoric occupation and place the Ozark natives in their proper context.

Whether these peoples were the ancestors of later historic Indian groups who populated the area adjacent to the Arkansas

Ozarks or whether they abandoned the plateau for reasons unknown, the only Indian tribe identified with northwest Arkansas after 1700 were the Osage who hunted throughout the western Ozarks. Archeological research indicates, however, that the Osage never occupied the Ozarks in any permanent fashion.¹⁵ And, as pressure mounted from the approaching white frontier, the Osage, in the treaty of Fort Clark (1808), relinquished all claim to land in Arkansas north of the Arkansas River.¹⁶ In spite of the treaty, the Osage continued to use northern and western Arkansas for hunting -- a practice which led them into increasing conflict with an immigrant Arkansas tribe, the Cherokee.

The Cherokee Indians were not indigenous to Arkansas, but moved there when forced out of their traditional lands farther east. The first contingent of Cherokee to Arkansas probably arrived shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Hopewell in 1785. Through the terms of that agreement, Cherokees in Tennessee agreed to cede to the United States certain parcels of land. A small number of the tribe, dissatisfied with the treaty, embarked down the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers until they reached the mouth of the St. Francis River in Arkansas and ascended that stream. After a residence of a few years along the St. Francis, the Indians moved westward to a more satisfactory location on the White. From time to time other dissidents joined the group until by 1817 they numbered between two and three thousand.¹⁷

Shortly after the Treaty of Hopewell, another group of Cherokees left Tennessee and settled along the northern bank of the Arkansas River.¹⁸ In 1808, a delegation of discontented Tennessee Cherokees arrived in Washington, D.C. to petition the President to set aside lands west of the Mississippi for their use as hunting grounds. An exploring party decided that land between the Arkansas and the White rivers in present Arkansas would be suitable. Some years later on July 8, 1817 Joseph McMinn, General David Meriwether, and General Andrew Jackson concluded a treaty with the Cherokees whereby the Indians ceded two large tracts of land in Tennessee in exchange for a wide strip of land between the two aforementioned rivers. The boundary of the new tract began on the north bank of the Arkansas at the mouth of Point Remove Creek and ran northeast to Chataunga Mountain on the White River, thence up the White to the mouth of the Little North Fork Creek, thence southwest on a line parallel to the eastern border to Table Rock Bluff on the Arkansas.¹⁹ The new Cherokee lands included the entire watershed of the Buffalo River.

The movement of the Cherokees onto their new reserve continued in earnest after 1817. Just over a year after the signing of the treaty, Governor McMinn of Tennessee reported that 864 families had either already departed or were preparing to and that that total amounted to one-half the Cherokee Nation.²⁰ In

1819 after the signing of yet another treaty, he observed that six thousand Indians had left Tennessee for Arkansas. The latter figure, however, was disputed by those Cherokees who elected to remain east of the Mississippi. Indeed, those who opposed both the treaty and any suggestion that they leave their homeland protested that the number stated by McMinn was grossly exaggerated and that a more realistic figure would be thirty-five hundred. Moreover, roughly four times that number, they claimed, remained east of the river.²¹ Nevertheless, the Cherokees continued to immigrate to the treaty lands in Arkansas.

The preponderance of the newcomers settled along the banks of the Arkansas although a few made their way into the Buffalo River area. Local legends contend that a Cherokee village, Sequatchie, was located on the Buffalo in northern Searcy County at the mouth of Spring Creek.²² The village, alleged in local tradition to be the largest town built in Arkansas by the Cherokees, was presided over by Peter Cornstalk who married the daughter of one of the early white settlers in the region, Robert Adams. Sequatchie was supposedly abandoned in 1832 when its inhabitants moved to the Indian Territory in present Oklahoma.²³ A somewhat less dramatic, although more substantial reference to Cherokees living in the vicinity of the Buffalo River was recorded by one of the initial land surveyors in present Searcy County. On November 7, 1829 the surveyor noted that a village of Cherokees was located on Bear Creek in the southwestern part of the county.²⁴ That this was a permanent settlement was somewhat substantiated by the observation by another surveyor five years later that the settlers that he found along Bear Creek were "cultivating the land which has been improved by the Indians."²⁵ Few of the tribe must have moved into the Ozarks, however, for the main body of Indians protested fervently when the western line of the reserve was mistakenly drawn giving them less land on the Arkansas and more on the White. In a letter to President James Monroe, the Arkansas Cherokees complained in 1824 that the faulty line "deprives us of the best soil for agriculture," and "throws most all the Cherokees from their farms and houses to rugged and dreary mountains."²⁶

In any case, the Western Cherokees remained dissatisfied with their existence in Arkansas. They believed that the land allotted them there was less than that appropriated in the treaties of 1817 and 1819. Furthermore, the Cherokees complained that the Osage tribe to the west was provoking hostilities and that the United States government was irregular in the payment of their annuities.²⁷ To resolve those grievances, the Western Cherokees sent a delegation to Washington in the spring of 1828. Although prohibited by tribal proclamation from negotiating any cession or exchange of territory, the representatives of the tribe yielded to pressure from the government and signed a treaty on May 6, 1828 which provided for an additional exchange of land. Through the terms of that agreement, the Western Cherokees

surrendered all rights to land in Arkansas and accepted as their "permanent home" a tract of land amounting to seven million acres in present Oklahoma.²⁸ Upon its return home, the Cherokee delegation met a decidedly hostile reception. The delegates' lives and property were threatened, the national council declared them guilty of fraud and deception, and the treaty was declared null and void.²⁹ Nevertheless, the Cherokee in Arkansas recognized the inevitability of the situation and began to depart their home of ten years and move onto new land to the west.

Ozark legends and folk traditions are, of course, not limited to stories of Cherokee villages. In 1541 Hernando de Soto marched into Arkansas and planted the seed which centuries later grew into Ozark tales of Spanish treasure. The exact point of his crossing of the Mississippi and the extent of his explorations in Arkansas remain issues of speculation. Only the latter topic, however, is relevant here. Seeking gold and glory, De Soto began his trek in 1539 from the gulf coast of Florida, and after exploring as far north as the headwaters of the Coosa River near the present Georgia-Tennessee border, he crossed the Mississippi during the spring of 1541. His route from there is conjectural. Many historians trace his explorations to the central portion of the state, while others believe he explored, at least partially, the Arkansas Ozarks. One of the latter, Henry R. Schoolcraft, even postulated that not only did De Soto explore the highlands of Arkansas, but also claimed he traversed the Buffalo from mouth to source.³⁰ Others are not so bold, but several do place him in the Ozarks.³¹ The question of the Spaniard's exploits in Arkansas will, perhaps, forever remain shrouded in ambiguity and uncertainty. Certainly the only evidence locating his expedition within the Buffalo River watershed, other than the vague descriptive narrative of the expedition's journals, consists of rumors and tales of Spanish gold and lost caves with ancient dates scratched on their walls.³² Such information is largely bound up in local folklore and rarely produces tangible evidence of Spanish occupation.

Although not conclusive proof that De Soto passed near the Buffalo River, the contents of a bluff shelter just outside the watershed perhaps holds a clue to the Spaniard's route. In southern Newton County along a steep bluff lies a rockshelter wherein is carved a Latin inscription which reads GLORIA PATRI ET FILIO ET ESPRITU SANCTO. Showing signs of painstaking effort, the carving is on a large limestone boulder which faces the rear of the shelter, well within and protected by the overhanging rock face.³³ The shelter is in a next to inaccessible location and not along main traveled roads.

The possibility that the inscription could date from the sixteenth century, while interesting, is purely speculative. But the alternatives suggest no rational explanation. If the carving is not Spanish in origin, of necessity, it is of much more recent

derivation. After the passage of De Soto, no recorded journey was made into the Arkansas Ozarks until the entrance of white pioneer farmers during the 1820s and 1830s, although unknown French couriers d'bois could certainly have penetrated the area. The inscription is clearly of Catholic genesis. The early American settlers, however, almost entirely consisted of Protestants, and while Catholics appeared during the latter part of the century, they resided in central Searcy County far from the bluffs of southern Newton County. It is conceivable that during the Civil War a battle-weary straggler or fugitive took advantage of the shelter's secluded nature and chiseled the inscription. In 1864, a Union detachment attacked and scattered an independent company of Confederates in the valley below the shelter. But the company consisted of local farmers, and it is doubtful that any were sufficiently acquainted with Latin to conceive of such a purposeful endeavor. Possibly the letters were cut by some ephemeral traveler who temporarily sought refuge in the dry recess. Yet the shallow cave is all but inaccessible, and only with great difficulty would a needy wayfarer seek that particular shelter. In addition, the road on top of the ridge would have constituted the natural route of travel and for the casual wanderer the most trouble-free means of crossing the mountains. The inconvenient location of the site effectively negates the possibility of its being accidentally found by a resolute itinerant. The origin of the protected inscription remains, thus, lamentably obscure -- an obscurity that of itself adds intriguingly to the possibility of its being a De Soto remnant.

Although the Buffalo River country remained a remote and unsettled area well into the third decade of the nineteenth century, the name Buffalo River, or rather Buffaloe Fork of the White River, first appeared on a topographical map in 1810.³⁴ This map, one of the many that resulted from the early nineteenth century surveys of the trans-Mississippi West, appeared in Zebulon M. Pike's final report on his explorations along the upper Arkansas River in 1806 and 1807. While Pike was proceeding up that river into what would later become Colorado, a detachment of his survey party explored the lower reaches of the Arkansas. Headed by Lieutenant James B. Wilkinson, son of the commander of United States military forces in the Mississippi Valley, General James Wilkinson, this small group left the Pike expedition in present Kansas and marched down the Arkansas during the winter of 1806-1807. Upon completion of his survey, Wilkinson forwarded his report and a map of his route to Pike. Using the Wilkinson survey, his own maps, and several contemporary western charts, Pike commissioned Anthony Nau to prepare the maps which appeared in the final report. While it is unlikely that Wilkinson visited the region of the Buffalo himself, it is apparent that he learned of the river from settlers and travelers he encountered along the Arkansas. However he learned of the river's name, it seems to have been in common use by 1807, sometime before the river valley



Zebulon M. Pike's 1810 map of Buffalo Fork of the White River [Credit: Library of Congress, "The First Part of Capt. Pike's Chart of the Internal Part of Louisiana," Plate I:G1380/.P5/1810]

was actually settled by Euroamericans.³⁵

The origin of the name doubtless stemmed from the common occurrence of the American bison in the vicinity of the Buffalo. Until around 1820, the animal thrived along the northern and western portions of the Arkansas Territory.³⁶ In 1844, that tireless Traveler of the prairies, Josiah Gregg, noted that "within thirty years, they were abundant over much of the present states of Missouri and Arkansas."³⁷ Moreover, a sizeable quantity of bison bones have been unearthed in the numerous bluff shelters in the Ozarks indicating that the animal had long been an inhabitant of northwestern Arkansas.³⁸ Based apparently on the shaggy beast that then roamed Arkansas, the name Buffalo River was brought into usage by Wilkinson's survey and Pike's map.

The early development of the Buffalo River valley, which began two decades after the Wilkinson expedition, reflected in many ways the larger development of western America, and, in a very real sense, typifies that westward movement because the history of America's westward expansion is largely the story of the exploration and settlement of the waterways of North America. From the Monongehela and the James to the Rio Grande and the Willamette, the growth of the United States is inextricably bound up in its rivers. Along with the dramatic sagas associated with these giants of western migration are countless other stories of the quiet and undramatic peopling of the numerous rivers and streams which served as tributaries of those better known other highways to the interior. It was along these small streams that the American people went about the business of permanently settling the North American continent. The Buffalo is one of these rivers.

Unlike many of these "roads" to the interior, however, the Buffalo River was never used extensively as a course for transportation. With the exception of isolated instances, navigation of the river has been restricted to flat boats and rafts. The Buffalo is, along most of its way, too shallow for vessels possessing a deeper draft. In addition, the depth of the stream varies in direct proportion to the amount of rainfall in the watershed. The subsequent fluctuation in water level has prohibited the establishment of any constant or dependable system of conveyance by water. A single exception was the piloting of a steamboat some twenty-four miles up the river from its junction with the White. The trip during the 1890s was accomplished with no little difficulty and was never repeated.³⁹

The Buffalo River valley today is a forested region decidedly rural in character and appearance. Still inhabited log cabins, kerosene lamps, and outdoor plumbing, while rapidly diminishing along the river, furnish scattered yet vivid reminders of a not-so-distant past. It was in part because of

the river's relative remoteness and its unsuitability for reliable commerce that it was able to retain its natural character and become one of Arkansas's last free-flowing waterways. Its future as a free spirit was challenged in the 1950s and 1960s, however, when the Army Corps of Engineers revealed plans to construct two dams across it. Conservation and wilderness preservation organizations quickly mobilized to preserve the river. As a result, the National Park Service studied the Buffalo and announced that it was opposed to the impoundments and instead favored protecting the stream by placing it under federal jurisdiction as the Buffalo National River. On March 1, 1972, President Richard M. Nixon signed Public Law 92-237 which provided that 95,730 acres of land along the Buffalo be placed under federal ownership.⁴⁰ Thus by congressional action and presidential concurrence, the Buffalo River is destined to remain free, unbridled, and largely unspoiled by twentieth century development.

NOTES

1. Vance Randolph, We Always Lie to Strangers. Tall Tales From the Ozarks (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 14.
2. T.C. Hopkins, Marbles and Other Limestones (Little Rock: Brown Printing Company, 1893), p. 7; United States, Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo River Basin, Arkansas, White River Basin Comprehensive Study, Missouri and Arkansas, vol. I (Little Rock: Corps of Engineers, 1964), p. 5.
3. Vance Randolph, The Devil's Pretty Daughter and Other Ozark Folk Tales (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. xiii.
4. Milton D. Rafferty, The Ozarks: Land and Life (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), p. 4.
5. Oscar H. Hershey, "River Valleys of the Ozark Plateau," American Geologist, XVI (December 1895), pp. 352-357; Oscar H. Hershey, "Peneplains of the Ozark Highlands," American Geologist, XXVII (January 1901), p. 41; Nevin M. Fenneman, Physiography of Eastern United States (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1938), pp. 659-662.
6. William D. Thornbury, Regional Geomorphology of the United States (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965), pp. 262-270.
7. Ibid.
8. Isiah Bowman, Forest Physiography (New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1970), pp. 452-455; Fenneman, Physiography of Eastern United States, pp. 632-634, 656; A.H. Purdue, "Physiography of the Boston Mountains, Arkansas," Journal of Geology, IX (November-December 1901), p. 697.
9. G.I. Adams, Zinc and Lead Deposits of Northern Arkansas, United States Geological Survey, Professional Paper No. 24 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 16; [United States, Land Office], Original Field Notes, T16N R20W, Typescript Copy, State Land Office, Little Rock, Book 1598-A, Bundle 181, p. 12; Ibid., T15N R22W, Book 1609, Bundle 182, p. 420; Ibid., T15N R16W, Book 565-AB, Bundle 62, p. 10.
10. The wealth of prehistoric remains in the protected shelters prompted Mark R. Harrington, an archeologist for the Museum of the American Indian, to label these peoples the Ozark Bluff-dwellers. The term is misleading, however, and should be replaced with a series of sequential periods or phrases. Far from being the anomalous cultural group described by Harrington, the prehistoric inhabitants of the Ozarks were part of a broad

series of cultural patterns found throughout the Mississippi Valley and adjacent regions. They experienced continuous change throughout the prehistoric period and, significantly, made extensive use of sites in addition to the bluff shelters. See L. Mark Raab, "Expanding Prehistory in the Arkansas Ozarks," in Arkansas Archeology in Review ed. by Neal L. Turbowitz and Marvin D. Jeter, Arkansas Archeological Survey Research Series No. 15 (Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 1982), pp. 233-239; James A. Brown, Prehistoric Southern Ozarks Marginality: A Myth Exposed, Special Publication of the Missouri Archaeological Society No. 6 (Columbia: Missouri Archaeological Society, 1984.)

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II

"...came to arkansas...:"
Ante-Bellum Settlement of the Watershed

Arkansas in the 1830s was largely a remote frontier area whose population while rapidly expanding lagged significantly behind that of Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, and Tennessee, its four nearest neighbors. Except for the "urban" settlements of Little Rock, Camden, and Fort Smith, the population was scattered across the state on small subsistence farms or on somewhat more expansive cotton plantations in the southern and eastern counties and along the Red River in the southwest corner. Railroads had not yet connected the capital with major commercial centers on the Mississippi, and inland travel was limited to roads whose condition ranged from lamentable to impassable. River travel was relatively uncomplicated, but limited to the Arkansas, White, St. Francis, Ouachita, and the Red. This geographical isolation, common to most frontier areas, was felt most keenly by those who inhabited the mountainous sections of Arkansas.

Insulated by their environment, the settlers of the Ozarks and, to a lesser extent of the Ouachitas, remained for decades relatively untouched by contemporary social and cultural movements. Their isolation led to the development of a distinct cultural milieu. This mountain culture, as it has been labeled, originated in the frontier experience, but was molded and shaped by the exigencies of highland life.

In 1830 the United States was on the move. Its technology, literature, and politics were all in a state of flux as were its people. The westward movement, having begun on the Atlantic seaboard during the seventeenth century, continued. By 1830 there were twenty-four states in the Union, but only two (Louisiana and Missouri) were west of the Mississippi River. The line of frontier settlement ebbed and flowed along the geographical path of least resistance. In 1830 it ranged from southwestern Alabama, north to near the Tennessee border, then west to the Mississippi. The "cutting edge of civilization" then traveled north to west-central Illinois where it turned back to the east to Lake Erie. Northern Indiana and Illinois were largely unsettled as were most of Missouri, Louisiana, and the Arkansas Territory. There were pockets of pioneers west of that frontier line, notably in the areas surrounding the mouth of the Mississippi River, along the Missouri River, and in Arkansas.¹ In 1830 Arkansas possessed only 30,388 inhabitants, most of whom settled along the Arkansas and White rivers.² Yet even those early settlers had been preceded by the most independent of all frontiersmen -- the ubiquitous fur trapper and trader.

Shortly after the commencement of the nineteenth century those hardy individuals began entering northwestern Arkansas to exploit the large number of wild animals that then populated the region. Bear oil as well as various peltries were the primary goal of those early businessmen, and they were usually successful due to the great abundance of game. Indeed, it is reported that the present village of Oil Trough, Arkansas, located immediately down the White River from Batesville, earned its name because of the great quantities of bears that were killed in its vicinity.³

During an eighteen month period just prior to the beginning of the War of 1812, a three-man hunting party which probably camped on the upper White River, emerged, after a protracted campaign, with "about fifty beaver and otter, and about three hundred bear skins, and eight hundred gallons of bear's oil."⁴ The men transported their cargo by canoe, possibly down the Buffalo River, to the Mississippi and thence to New Orleans. Unfortunately, by the time they reached New Orleans the embargo proclaimed by President Jefferson prevented them from selling their goods for full value. Instead of the anticipated two to three thousand dollar profit, the three tired and frustrated trappers disappointedly divided among themselves the sum of thirty-six dollars.⁵

A few such adventurers settled in northwest Arkansas, raised a log cabin, cleared a few acres of bottomland, and lived a somewhat more sedate existence. Most, however, continued to use the abundant game of the central-Mississippi region to further their economic stake in life or moved on to other pursuits.⁶

In 1819, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, the New York ethnologist mentioned earlier, explored northern Arkansas and found a scattered, sparse population. Many of the settlers were accustomed to living close to the land and dispensed with the niceties of more refined areas of settlement. Schoolcraft noted that people living just north of the Buffalo River basin lived by hunting and agriculture, although vegetable gardens were unknown. Instead, corn and bear meat provided the main staples, but while they grew corn for bread, for their horses, and perhaps for the distillation of corn whiskey, it was not considered a cash crop.

In manners, morals, customs, dress, contempt of labour and hospitality, the state of society is not essentially different from that which exists among the savages. Schools, religion, and learning, are alike unknown. Hunting is the principal, the most honourable, and the most profitable employment. To excel in the chase [sic] procures fame, and a man's reputation is measured by his skill as a marksman, his agility and strength, his boldness and dexterity in killing game, and his patient endurance and contempt of

the hardships of the hunter's life. They are consequently, a hardy, brave, independent people, rude in appearance, frank and generous, travel without baggage, and can subsist any where in the woods, and would form the most efficient military corps in frontier warfare which can possibly exist.

Conditioned by their stern, harsh, and unyielding environment, those initial inhabitants along the upper White River formed the advance guard of the confident, optimistic, and determined pioneer farmer who would soon follow. By 1830 Arkansas was a part of that forward thrust of American civilization.

As previously noted, in 1830 the population of Arkansas amounted to 30,388 while Missouri and Louisiana possessed 140,455 and 215,739 inhabitants respectively.⁸ There were a number of reasons why Arkansas initially did not attract a large quantity of settlers. First of all, access was difficult. The swampy eastern border, along the Mississippi River, was impassable for wagons during some seasons, and there were few roads leading into east-central Arkansas from other directions. The most prominent of these was a crude military road from Memphis through Little Rock to Fort Smith, and another from the southeastern Missouri boundary through Little Rock to Fulton on the Red River.⁹ Thus, most of the early prospective immigrants to the territory came by water: either up the Mississippi by way of Louisiana or down that river from the Ohio. The extent upon which water transportation was relied upon is indicated by the fact that early population centers were located along either the Arkansas, White, or other smaller waterways. But the migrant who traveled the Mississippi looking for suitable farming land often found it long before he reached the future Bear State. For the settlers who floated down the Ohio and then the Mississippi, bountiful rich soil was available in southern Indiana, Illinois, and especially Missouri. Those settlers who proposed to enter the territory through New Orleans faced added obstacles. They not only had to fight against the unslacking current of the Mississippi, but also they constantly were lured by the luxuriantly fertile soils of the future states of Mississippi and Louisiana.¹⁰ Moreover, the northwest portion of Arkansas labored under an additional burden. Most of the mountain region in that area was claimed by the Cherokee Indians who did not agree to move west into the Indian Territory until 1828.¹¹ The Buffalo River country and the area around it, however, suffered from a hinderance far more intangible than the Cherokee occupation yet possibly equally retardant to vigorous growth.

A geographical description of the American West appeared in 1828 and was eagerly read by an American public seeking pertinent information about the remote yet promising western frontier. Timothy Flint's A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or the Mississippi Valley became so widely celebrated that

by 1852 when Harriet Beecher Stowe published her anti-slavery polemic Uncle Tom's Cabin, the author believed herself justified in casually mentioning Flint's work along with Paradise Lost and Pilgrim's Progress and assumed that her reading public was equally familiar with all three.¹² A Condensed Geography... informed its readers about various elements in each of the western states and territories. It described which areas were conducive to the growing of certain crops and which were not. It commented upon the rivers of the area and noted the extent of navigability of each, the condition of the soil along its banks, and the number and nature of its tributaries. The book further examined the climate, productions, and settlements of the western territories.

A quick reading of the Arkansas segment of the book would tend to discourage all but the most determined migrant from settling in northern Arkansas. While the state as a whole received favorable treatment, the Buffalo River country and its environs were the subject of generally negative, although truthful, coverage. For instance, Flint, echoing the early land surveyors, described the White River region in part as "broken land, and unfit for cultivation," and he presented the high prairies and timbered lands as "sterile." Flint further wrote of the "rocky and sterile ridges" and of the "no inconsiderable surface covered with mountains." While he conceded that the valleys nestled among the precipitous hills were conducive to growing a wide variety of crops, Flint warned that the mountainous area had one great drawback -- the frequent floods that followed the regular seasonal thunderstorms. The streams "have been known to rise forty feet perpendicular height, in a few hours. The standing corn and cotton is submerged; and the hope of the year destroyed."¹³ The number of potential Arkansas migrants who were acquainted with A Condensed Geography... cannot, of course, be determined, but one can accurately assume that Flint's less than encouraging account would have caused a prospective settler to reconsider the alternatives.

In spite of the difficulty in reaching the Arkansas Territory and of settling in the highland section of the region, people did begin to settle the Buffalo River valley during the two decades between 1820 and 1840. Before the Cherokee Indians ceded their land between the Arkansas and the White rivers, the first white pioneers entered the basin of the Buffalo and established homesites. Around 1822 a Kentuckian named Robert Adams immigrated to the Searcy County area and built a farm on Bear Creek.¹⁴ Three years later upper Bear Creek and the Richland valley to the west contained scattered clearings.¹⁵ The upper sections of the Buffalo were settled about the same time by emigrants primarily from Tennessee. Tennessean John Brisco settled near Jasper (the present county seat of Newton County) on the Little Buffalo in 1825.¹⁶ Farther up the Buffalo, Solomon Cecil, also from Tennessee, settled on what is now called Cecil

Creek near present Compton.¹⁷ Down-river from the Cecil homestead, Mitchell and Nancy Hill began a settlement near what would later become Mount Hersey.¹⁸ Around 1830 the mouth of the Buffalo was settled, and a small village that would later become Buffalo City was established. Located just north of the junction of the White and the Buffalo, the site marked the northern limit of deep draft navigation of the White. John Tabor and William Moreland were the first homesteaders at the mouth of the Buffalo and probably arrived there around 1829 or 1830.¹⁹ Others such as Samuel Hudson and John Campbell were to push on up-river.

Brought by his parents to northern Arkansas during the 1820s, Samuel Hudson struck out on his own in 1832 and homesteaded on Panther Creek within five miles of the future site of Jasper. First a farmer, later a stock-raiser, and still later the owner and operator of a grist mill, Hudson soon became one of the more influential inhabitants of the upper Buffalo. He is alleged to have killed hundreds of buffalo along the river and to have driven nine packs of hounds to death during his lifetime. During one of his hunting adventures he discovered a limestone cave which is now a popular tourist attraction called Diamond Cave. Like many men of his day who outlived their wives, Hudson married three times and fathered forty children.²⁰

John Campbell, another native of Tennessee, first entered Arkansas in 1837 with his wife and relatives. He settled on Calf Creek in Searcy and the year following his arrival was elected county surveyor. Two years later he served as county judge. He represented his county in the state legislature in 1842 and 1843 and again in 1852 and 1853. In 1861 he was a delegate to the Arkansas secession convention where he was one of five who initially voted against leaving the Union. Campbell, along with three of the others, later reversed his vote at the request of the convention's chairman. Following the Civil War, Campbell again served Searcy County in the state legislature and continued to influence local politics.²¹

The people who settled on the Buffalo for the most part were hardworking farmers who desired nothing more than to clear a few acres, build a log dwelling, and enjoy the peace and tranquility the valley had to offer. Perhaps most of the newcomers were not too unlike David Barnett who

came to arkansas in 1845 with a band of his country man - they came by the old army trail of that day - going west - to Buffalo City - there they struck out N-W came to a little place call Yellville there South west to Buffalo River where the Hiway 65 Bridge is now. the only Place crossable at that time of year. Now River to full to cross. All stopt and camp for the winter my father and one of the girls of the crew fell in love and got married...the Settle on a track of land where

they camped - Built a house and Homesteaded the land -
and lived most all their lives at this place.²²

Although the topography remained a considerable obstacle to settlement, Arkansas attracted increasingly larger numbers of settlers once the Cherokees moved west in 1828. The territorial census of 1833 reported a population of 40,660 -- an increase of 34 percent in only three years.²³ That precipitate growth registered in the northern areas of the territory and caused the formation of additional counties. For some time prior to 1835 the citizens of large Izard County had clamored for a division of that political entity. In November 1835, the territorial legislature approved the change and formed from western Izard a new political division initially termed Searcy County. A year later, however, bowing to the wishes of the inhabitants of the new county, the legislature renamed the county Marion in honor of General Francis Marion from South Carolina.²⁴ Born in 1732 near Georgetown, Marion, at the start of the American Revolution, was a representative to the provisional congress of South Carolina and later entered the Colonial Army where he remained for the duration of the war. The general died at home in South Carolina at the age of sixty-three.²⁵ The exact relationship between Marion and the early settlers of northern Arkansas is unclear. Perhaps relatives of his immigrated to the region and sought to immortalize their ancestor. Possibly men who served under his command during the war and later moved to Arkansas wished to show their respect for the military leader. Perhaps it was his reputation as the Swamp Fox. Quite possibly the settlers had merely emigrated from Marion County, Tennessee and wished to use a familiar name. In any case, the county was so named and the seat of justice was established at a place later named Yellville in honor of Archibald Yell who served as governor of Arkansas from 1840 to 1844.²⁶

The second Buffalo River county was formed in December, 1838, when the southern portion of Marion was set aside and designated Searcy County.²⁷ This, the forty-first Arkansas county, was named after Richard Searcy, an accomplished lawyer in the northern part of the state. A Tennessean, Searcy first went to Arkansas in 1817 while it was still attached to Missouri and later made his home at Batesville on the White River. He was appointed first clerk of the Independence County courts and in 1823 became a territorial judge. Two years later political influence caused his removal from office, and although he attempted to regain his place on the territorial bench, his efforts were in vain. Searcy died in Batesville in 1832 a wealthy and respected citizen.²⁸ A select group of commissioners located the Searcy County seat at Lebanon, six miles west of present Marshall, but eighteen years later it was relocated to the more populous center of Burrowsville, which in 1867 was renamed Marshall after John Marshall, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.²⁹

By the early 1840s the headwaters region of the Buffalo River was sufficiently populated to warrant the creation of yet another political district. In December, 1842, Governor Archibald Yell signed an act that detached the southeastern part of Carroll County and formed the forty-seventh county, Newton. The act stated that the seat of justice be established at the house of John Bellah on the Little Buffalo River. The following year the county seat was permanently established at the town of Jasper, a few miles down-river from Bellah's.³⁰ Thomas Willoughby Newton, for whom the county was named, arrived in frontier Arkansas in 1820 at the age of seventeen. After short careers as a mail carrier, court clerk, and clerk for the Third Territorial Legislature in 1823, Newton served as a delegate to the state legislature from 1844 to 1846. In December of 1846 he was elected to the United States House of Representatives to fill the unexpired term of an Arkansas congressman who resigned to participate in the war with Mexico. Consequently, he became the only Whig ever sent to Washington from Arkansas.³¹

The naming of the counties for Newton and Searcy, who were both Whigs, was strangely prophetic, for both counties during the years following the Civil War became political mavericks. In a Democratic state those two counties repeatedly voted for Republican candidates for President and continued to do so well into the twentieth century.

The settlement of the Buffalo River basin grew at a steady rate. Determined farmers and hunters, primarily from Tennessee, entered the region in ever increasing numbers. A study of the census returns reveals that immigration into Marion, Newton, and Searcy counties not only kept pace with the rest of the state, but also, on occasion, surpassed it. The decade of the 1840s saw the population of Arkansas increase by 115.1 percent: a figure greater, although not significantly, than that of Marion (74.2 percent) and Searcy (111.4 percent). Because Newton remained a part of Carroll County until 1842, no accurate figures are available for that county. During the following years, 1850 to 1860, Arkansas doubled its population with an increase of 107.5 percent. But both Marion and Searcy counties grew at a rate more than 50 percent higher. The population of those counties increased 168.3 and 166.3 percent respectively. The newest of the three counties, Newton, had the lowest rate of increase at 93 percent.³² That phenomenon of rapid growth must be attributed to the fact that ante-bellum Arkansas was a part of the North American frontier and consequently experienced the population boom typical of such areas. It must be noted, however, that the figures represent only a relative condition and that the seemingly high percentages do not indicate that the Buffalo Basin was being quickly overrun with log cabins. Indeed, the valley remained very sparsely settled; a portion of the 1860 increase may be actually due to an under enumeration in 1850. In 1860 Arkansas possessed 435,450 inhabitants, while the combined total

TABLE 1
ANTE-BELLUM POPULATION

	MARION	NEWTON	SEARCY	ARKANSAS
<u>1840</u>				
White	1,221	---	933	77,174
Slave	39	---	3	19,935
Free Colored	65	---	---	465
TOTAL	1,325		936	97,574
<u>1850</u>				
White	2,053	1,701	1,950	162,189
Slave	126	47	29	47,100
Free Colored	129	7	---	608
TOTAL	2,308	1,758	1,979	209,897
% Increase	74.2%		111.4%	115.1%
<u>1860</u>				
White	5,923	3,369	5,178	324,191
Slave	261	24	93	111,115
Free Colored	8	---	---	144
TOTAL	6,192	3,393	5,271	435,450
% Increase	168.3%	93%	166.3%	107.5%

of the three highland counties amounted to only 14,856--3.4 percent of the total state population and representing a density of approximately 6.6 individuals per square mile.³³

The new arrivals to the Arkansas Ozarks originated, not surprisingly, from contiguous areas. As immigrants sought familiar land, Tennessee led all other states in the number of newcomers to Arkansas. Up to 1860 an average of 50 percent of the new arrivals to Searcy and Marion counties came from that state. In Newton County, as well, most settlers came from Tennessee, although after 1850 the preponderance of immigrants arrived from Missouri. A similar change in place of origin occurred in Marion and Searcy counties during the next decade and continued at least for the next twenty years, as most of the new arrivals to those two counties claimed Missouri as their former residence.³⁴ When examined jointly, statistics show that emigrants from both states, Missouri and Tennessee, contributed over 60 percent of the new arrivals into the three county region during the years up to 1860.

Many of the initial settlers along the Buffalo failed to obtain legal title to the land that they had painstakingly cleared and upon which they had erected a dwelling. Squatters were not uncommon to the western frontier. The practice of settling on land without benefit of ownership had been prevalent along the fringes of the American frontier for some time. As early as 1784, George Washington noted in his diary an incident with squatters on his own property, and as President he spoke against such illegal trespasses.³⁵ As the nation grew and the population steadily increased, the settlement of land not yet "open" for homesteading became increasingly common. The reasons for this were several. Without question, a major cause of squatting was that land surveys were not able to keep up with impatient settlers. Although inadequate congressional appropriations was the immediate cause, a more general and serious reason stemmed from the opposition to the development of western lands by older, more conservative areas of the East. A corresponding reason for widespread squatting was even more basic: Settlers on federal land avoided paying both the purchase price for the land and the annual county and state real estate taxes. Many of those who settled the highland frontier were an individualistic breed who were shrewd enough to elude the scrutiny of the local tax collectors and suspicious enough of legal maneuvering to seek civil obscurity.³⁶

Regardless of the reason, squatting on the public domain was not sanctioned by law, and many a frontier farmer found the land he had cleared, cultivated, and improved, but to which he had no legal title, suddenly offered for sale. Westerners, thus, at an early date began to petition Congress demanding that the initial settler be given certain rights regarding the purchase of the land he occupied. The quest for "squatters' rights" won

increasing support in Congress, and in 1830 it passed the first of a series of badly needed pre-emption laws. The initial act forgave squatters and allowed them to purchase their land without having to take their chances through competitive bidding. (This advantage alone no doubt fostered yet additional squatting.) The 1830 law was re-enacted throughout the 1830s until in 1841 Congress passed a permanent pre-emption act.³⁷ The practice of residing upon land without statutory possession was consequently well-established by the time the Buffalo River country was settled.

That squatting was prevalent cannot be contested, but other than in general terms, the exact extent of it has never been determined. How extensive it was along the Buffalo may, perhaps, be instructive in understanding the essence of frontier land tenure. It has been established that the incidence of squatters was greatest where the line of frontier settlement outdistanced the capability of the United States government to conduct surveys. In the Boston Mountains of northwest Arkansas, the surveys began during the latter years of the 1820s. But even then the work was not accomplished immediately. The initial surveys, which took place from roughly 1829 to 1834, measured and marked only the eastern and southern boundary lines of each township. Once those lines were established, the interior surveys began. This latter measuring, a much more tedious and protracted task, was not completed until almost 1850. Many of the initial settlers of the Buffalo region consequently were squatters by reason of their premature entrance into the watershed. In western Searcy County, for instance, a surveyor in 1834 found fifteen families living in one unplotted township. He noted in his field notes, however, that most were anxious to purchase their improved lands.³⁸

Apparently, those eager settlers and their neighbors were not as intent on legalizing their claims as they led the surveyor to believe. Once the land was properly platted, there was no rush to file the proper papers and pay up. The mountain folk were seemingly content to forgo the bothersome and costly task of obtaining legal title to their land. Under the provisions of the Land Law of 1820, Congress reduced the minimum price per acre to \$1.25, and established the minimum purchase at eighty acres. The act abolished the credit system for payment which had been allowed since 1800.³⁹ Thus while smaller tracts of land were available at a cheaper price, total payment of one hundred dollars was required upon purchase. Few settlers along the Buffalo, or for that matter, along the American frontier, possessed the necessary financial resources to capitalize on the reduced purchase requirements.

A study of fifty-five settlers known to be occupying land within the Buffalo River watershed at the time of the original land surveys reveals the extent to which squatting was practiced.

Of the total identified homesites, only fourteen were ever legally owned by the initial occupant or by a member of his family. Fully 74 percent of those individuals known to be living in that area during the 1830s and 1840s failed, for one reason or another, to secure title to their land.⁴⁰ Many, of course, moved to other areas after only a short residence in the region, while still others doubtless decided to purchase neighboring land other than that which they originally occupied. Of those who did obtain a title, most were relatively prompt in doing so. Of the fourteen who filed for their land, one-half received legal possession by 1850, and another five were legitimate owners before another decade had elapsed. Interestingly enough, the final two subjects, or their descendants, waited a considerable length of time before filing their documents: the first obtained his in 1870 and the second in 1900.⁴¹

Without additional figures it is impossible to determine whether there were more or fewer squatters per capita along the Buffalo than in other areas. In any case, clearly there was no sense of urgency among the peoples of the Boston Mountains to obtain clear and official title to their lands. Perhaps they felt secure in their isolated valleys and considered quite remote the possibility that anyone would want their land. Or, perhaps, they were too independent and obstinate (or shrewd) to go through the proper legal procedures of gaining a clear title. Or, perhaps, they were exceptionally trusting of their fellow man and had faith that no moral person would "legally steal" the land that another had so laboriously improved.⁴² Whatever the legal and procedural questions concerning the acquisition of land, the overriding concern of those initial settlers was to provide enough food for their families and to hope that a surplus would enable them to purchase the supplies and implements they could not manufacture themselves.

By 1860 the rugged valley contained not quite fifteen thousand inhabitants. Scattered along the length of the one hundred and forty-eight mile stream, they built their log homes and tilled the fertile bottom lands. On the swift tributaries they built grist mills and saw mills to provide fundamental comforts for their frontier society. Towns were few and widely scattered. The immediate area around Buffalo City probably contained the largest concentration of inhabitants: 214.⁴³ The county seats of the three counties were growing, if not thriving, communities, and there were other centers of frontier life that as yet were unnamed but would soon become small social and economic nuclei complete with schools, churches, and assorted businesses. There were an equal number of churches and schools in 1860 with the former being simple "log Cabins that have been built by Common labor and for the accommodation of no one sect to the exclusion of another...."⁴⁴ Although there were around twenty schools within the watershed, the disinterest with which the settlers held them forced the census taker in 1850 to commend

that "there appears to [be] a greater degree of apathy here [Marion County] than I have ever witnessed in any county whatever."⁴⁵ Indeed, the illiteracy rate among those inhabitants twenty years of age and older ranged from 40 percent in Marion County to 60 percent in Newton.⁴⁶

The people who inhabited the valleys and ridges of the river basin were hardworking frontier farmers who were largely self-sufficient. Because they operated small and relatively autonomous farms (the average in 1850 was twenty-eight improved acres per farm)⁴⁷ and did not concentrate on a single cash crop, they had little need for slaves. Yet in 1860 there were 378 black slaves scattered throughout the watershed and its immediate area. Individual holdings were small with the average being 3.7 per slave owner although Orin L. Dodd, a forty-six year old farmer from Tennessee, possessed thirty-five slaves on his Rapp's Barren, Marion County plantation.⁴⁸

The black population within the three county region, while it consisted largely of slaves, also contained a significant proportion of free-blacks. Marion County possessed not only the largest non-slave black population in the state, 21.2 percent in 1850, but also in both 1840 and 1850 it contained a greater number of free-blacks than slaves. This concentration of emancipated blacks seemingly consisted primarily of two extended families from Tennessee, one of which had immigrated to the region early in the 1830s, the other only shortly before 1850. The unusualness of their conspicuous presence in the region was eclipsed only by the fact that these free Negroes were not tenant farmers but landholders. Indeed, fifteen out of the twenty families living within the county in 1850 possessed their own farm land, and two of them could boast of property valued at one thousand dollars and above.⁴⁹ These black farmers were not mere transients searching for a favorable location in which to settle, but rather they were established members of the community, or at least tolerated, by the hill folk of northwest Arkansas. Apparently, however, the rising tide of racial intolerance and sectional animosity which characterized the United States during the decade of the 1850s finally reached the Arkansas Ozarks, for by 1860 the blacks were gone. Of the 129 in 1850 only eight remained ten years later.⁵⁰ Although Arkansas had restricted free black immigration since 1838, little attention had apparently been paid to the prohibitive ordinances. In 1859, the Arkansas legislature passed a law forbidding free-blacks to remain in the state after January 1, 1860, but effective enforcement of the statute in the mountainous regions of the state was probably irregular at best.⁵¹ Whether they departed on their own accord or were forced to leave by their neighbors, their existence in the county for over a decade denotes an appearance of acceptance or indulgence on the part of their neighbors. Tolerance of that nature would not have been possible in some of the more populated areas of the state.

Thus, on the eve of the Civil War, the Buffalo River valley was populated with settlers who had arrived from adjacent states, who often lived on land they did not own, and who operated farms that were largely self-sufficient. Surrounded by the hills which, perhaps, first attracted them to the region, those Ozark pioneers reflected the rigid determination and dedication to survival which characterized most frontier regions. But the settlers along the Buffalo developed, in addition, apparent satisfaction with their surroundings and a corresponding disinclination to follow the continuing westward movement of the American people. Although the geographical immobility of these early settlers has as yet not been analyzed, it is postulated that the highland dwellers constituted a much more static frontier society than did their contemporaries who resided in more accessible areas. The individuals who populated the valleys and "hollers" along the Buffalo River clung to familiar customs, practices, and habits out of necessity; a necessity imposed upon them by the rugged character of their environment. Prior to 1860, they were able to remain aloof from the growing national controversy, but the Civil War deeply affected the people of the valley and altered their politics and their patterns of life for decades thereafter.

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III

THE CIVIL WAR YEARS

The Presidential election of 1860 proved to be the most portentous of any national referendum either before or since. After a decade of sectional bickering over the institution of slavery, the American people were clearly divided among the four candidates. The Republican Party presented as its candidate the lawyer from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, while the Democratic Party, which had foundered on the rocks of the sectional debate, split into northern and southern factions and nominated Stephen A. Douglas and John C. Breckinridge respectively. Meanwhile, the Constitutional Union Party attempted to offer a compromise between the extreme northern and southern positions and nominated John Bell. Because of the political divisiveness which characterized the nation by 1860, Lincoln received only a minority of the popular votes but managed to obtain a clear majority of the ballots cast in the Electoral College. Thus Abraham Lincoln became the nation's sixteenth President and was fated to preside over its greatest crisis.

Arkansas, being a slave state and basically Democratic, voted for the southern Democratic candidate, John C. Breckinridge. But the state was far from unanimous in its decision. Northwest Arkansas and scattered counties in the northeastern and southwestern portions of the state voted for John Bell.¹ That division of political sentiment was typical of the states of the upper South. Arkansas, along with Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia, was never a zealous adherent of the extreme Southern secessionist position. Although the tumultuous events of the 1850s aided those radicals who believed only secession would cure the vexatious problems besetting the South, the majority of Arkansans continued to favor the preservation of the Union. Even during the highly emotional period immediately following the election of Lincoln, no appreciable increase in enthusiasm for secession may be detected.² Arkansas seemed content to observe patiently the quickly developing situation and not be rushed into any action which it might later regret.

Shortly after news of the Lincoln victory became known, the South Carolina legislature called a convention to discuss the question of secession. On December 20, 1860, that body overwhelmingly adopted a resolution which dissolved "the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States under the name of the United States of America...."³ The convention cited as causes the failure of northern states to return fugitive slaves, the general subversion of the constitution by the non-slaveholding states, and lastly, the election of a President

"whose opinions and purposes are hostile to Slavery."⁴

There were those in many of the other southern states who harbored similar beliefs. Governor Henry Rector of Arkansas was one. Believing that the election of Lincoln made impossible the continued participation of Arkansas within the Union, Rector was joined by Senator Robert W. Johnson and Representative Thomas C. Hindman in calling for a convention to determine the future course of the state. On January 12, the state legislature approved a bill allowing the people of Arkansas to vote either for or against the calling of the convention. The act also contained a provision allowing for the simultaneous election of delegates if the people voted in the affirmative. By a margin of 11,586 out of a total of 43,238 votes cast, the call for the convention was approved. On March 4, 1861, the Arkansas congress met at Little Rock, but after two and a half weeks could only agree to hold an election the following August to feel the pulse of the people and then abide by their wishes.⁵

National events, however, would not wait for the Arkansas state plebiscite. While the entire federal military establishment in Texas peaceably surrendered to the Texas Secession Convention as early as February 18, the event which sparked the American Civil War occurred two months later with the firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. Three days later President Lincoln issued the call for volunteers. Governor Rector considered the President's request an insult and the Arkansas populace seemed to agree. The secession congress was called back into session and on May 6 the convocation passed the ordinance of secession by a vote of sixty-five to five. Seeking a display of unanimity, the president of the convention, David Walker, asked the five dissenters to reverse their position and four complied, with John Campbell of Searcy County being among them. But Isaac Murphy, a future governor from mountainous Madison County, stood firm.⁶ The step, nevertheless, had been taken and Arkansas joined eight other seceded states. The entrance of the state into the Civil War marked the beginning of a tragic period for the northern part of Arkansas. The ensuing conflict would change not only the complexion of the land, but also the established relationship among the highland people.

At the time of the first census after Arkansas attained statehood in 1836, the number of slaves residing in the highland portion of the state roughly equalled those living in the counties bordering the Mississippi River. But as time progressed, the greater concentration of them tended toward the cotton producing lowlands and away from the Ozarks. Between 1850 and 1860 the number of slaves increased in every county except one, Newton, and the rate of growth was much greater in the southeastern portion of the state.

In the six heaviest slave counties, the average size of the

slaveholding was about seventeen. But in six northwestern counties where slaves were not numerous, the average holding was about four. Thus while the average sized slave holding along the Mississippi included from two to six families, a typical holding in the highlands was limited to two to three Negroes. More important, only 1.6 percent of the whites in northwest Arkansas owned any slaves at all. And in the three counties of the Buffalo Drainage a mere .7 percent of the free population were slave owners.⁷ That factor combined with the geography of the northwest, which was not conducive to the large-scale growing of cotton, resulted in that area maintaining a political indifference common to the mountainous regions of the South. The people of Northwest Arkansas could not readily identify with the problems encountered, whether real or imagined, by the radical South. Many, of course, did consider themselves Southerners and favored secession after Lincoln's call for volunteers. But a large number of Arkansas' hillfolk either were undecided in sentiment or favored the Union cause. Those individuals began seeking others who maintained similar sentiments.

As early as the autumn of 1861 certain mountain residents began to join secret organizations named in different counties the Peace Society, the Peace Organization Society, the Home Protection Society, the Home Guard, and in one case, the Pro Bono Publico Society.⁸ The exact nature of the various organizations which sprang up in Searcy, Van Buren, Izard, Carroll, Fulton, and Marion counties is still largely unclear. According to the constitution of one of the societies, the members' sole purpose was to "combine together for the mutual protection of themselves their families and their property."⁹ And if the depositions of numerous former members are to be believed, most considered it just such a protective agency and after being discovered were willing either to take an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy or to volunteer to serve in the southern army.¹⁰ It would appear that the organizations posed little threat to the Little Rock government, much less to the one in Richmond and had little to offer the Union. It is extremely possible that the individuals concerned merely desired to remain detached from either side and continue their existence much as they were accustomed.¹¹ Yet to the mid-nineteenth century South, a secret organization surely signaled pernicious political intrigue.

Accordingly, in the latter part of November, 1861, a distraught Governor Henry Rector wrote Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, that "a conspiracy had been discovered in the northern part of the State against the Confederate Government."¹² The governor further remarked that the members intended to join the Union Army when, and if, it entered Arkansas, and that the membership was estimated as high as 1,700.¹³ Although two companies of infantry were quickly dispatched to the threatened area, local citizens loyal to the southern cause had "suppressed" the movement by the time of their

TABLE 2
SLAVEHOLDERS AND SLAVES: 1860

Number of Slaves	Slaveholders		
	MARION	NEWTON	SEARCY
1	30	6	6
2	14	2	3
3	5	2	1
4	7	---	1
5	3	---	3
6	2	---	---
7	1	---	1
8	---	1	1
9	2	---	2
10 to 14	5	---	1
15 to 19	---	---	1
20 to 29	---	---	---
30 to 39	1	---	---
TOTAL OF SLAVEHOLDERS	70	11	20
TOTAL OF SLAVES	261	24	93

SOURCE: United States, Census Bureau, [1860 Census], Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled From the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), p. 224.

arrival. Dozens of questionable residents were rounded up and confined to the jails of the various counties, even though they had not "engaged in any act of open disloyalty to our Government."¹⁴ In Searcy County, considered to be one of the centers of the dissent, Colonel Samuel Leslie, commandant of the county militia, mobilized his men and began conducting widespread arrests of suspicious members. As the number of suspects began to mount and the county jail at Burrowsville reached capacity, Colonel Leslie received orders from Governor Rector, commanding him to march his captives to Little Rock for legal disposition. Convinced that the threat to the Confederacy was genuine and serious, Rector swore to "arrest and imprison them or to execute them for treason...as enemies of their country -- whose peace and safety is being endangered by their disloyalty and treasonable acts."¹⁵

In compliance with his orders, Leslie restrained the seventy-eight prisoners with logging chains, linked them in pairs, and marched them to Little Rock in six days, a distance of approximately 100 miles.¹⁶ There, along with other prisoners, they were addressed by Rector himself who offered them the choice of "volunteering for service in the Confederate army or going to jail. He assured them that if they chose the latter, months might elapse before a trial could be held and if they persisted in their request for a trial, he was confident they would be found guilty and be hanged."¹⁷ Of the 117 recipients of Rector's ultimatum, all but fifteen chose military service.¹⁸ A grand jury two months later listened to the plight of the fifteen who preferred a trial. The panel found that no treasonable acts had been committed, that their offense "consisted more of words and threats than overt acts," and fully exonerated all fifteen.¹⁹

Those who joined the Confederate army were quickly organized into companies and sent to the theater of war on the eastern side of the Mississippi where they participated in the battle at Shiloh and other engagements. But those reluctant volunteers were less than enthusiastic about their fate, and numerous Arkansans deserted. In many instances the troops were later dismissed or furloughed subject to recall. Most returned to their homes and after a short visit with their families joined Federal forces operating out of Missouri.²⁰ Peace Society member David Barnett was probably typical of many who were forced into Confederate military service. "The first chance Father got he ran away -- came back home a few days -- then west to the Federal army and Joined them. Father Joined the 3rd Arkansas Cavilry -- served through the war -- after the war was over -- and he Past a way -- the Government -- Place a tomb stone on his grave."²¹

The precipitate action of the Arkansas Confederate government had an unsettling effect on the northwestern part of the state. Initially hoping they could remain reasonably isolated from the conflict by their rough surroundings, the

highland dwellers quickly realized that strict nonpartisanship would be impossible. Although the region was predominantly Union in sentiment, there remained a large number of inhabitants with southern sympathies. Indeed, the Confederacy retained possession of the area for the first year and a half of the war.

Following the vigorous suppression of the various peace societies, the northwest portion of the state was slow to become directly involved in the conflict. Arkansas, like Missouri, was of secondary importance to the Union, although both were significant to the war in the West because of their geographic location. A major objective of the Lincoln administration was to exert northern control over the Mississippi River thereby cutting the Confederacy in half and reducing its military effectiveness.²² Because both states are bordered on the east by the river, it was imperative that they be brought under Union domination. Early northern attempts to secure Missouri had proved ineffective, but in December, 1861, Brigadier General Samuel R. Curtis was appointed commander of the state's Southwestern District. Acting with resolution, the general began slowly pushing Confederate troops out of that portion of Missouri. By February, 1862, the southerners had withdrawn well into Arkansas and were regrouping for a confrontation. Curtis followed and on March 7 the two armies met in one of the most decisive Civil War battles west of the Mississippi. After two days of hard fighting in area dominated by a rise called Pea Ridge, after which the battle took its name, the Confederate force, led by Major General Earl Van Dorn, withdrew from the fray and headed for the Arkansas River to the south. The victory of Curtis at Pea Ridge ensured the security of Missouri, and if it did not establish Union control over northern Arkansas, it at least prevented the Confederacy from using it as a staging area.²³ Two months later General Curtis extended his influence in northern Arkansas by marching down the White River and on May 4 occupying Batesville.²⁴

The loss at Pea Ridge and the occupation of Batesville did not, however, mean the forfeiture of the Buffalo River country to the North. Both before and after the battle, individuals within the valley formed Confederate units and enlisted at Yellville. Indeed, Yellville was quickly becoming the principal Southern arsenal in northern Arkansas. Concentrated there were perhaps 1,000 men guarding a large store of munitions, warehouses, and a nearby saltpeter works.²⁵

The Confederate loss in extreme northwest Arkansas did announce to many loyalists that Missouri was solidly in Union hands and furthermore served as a subtle invitation to join the northern cause. Thus began a mass exodus of northern sympathizers into southern Missouri. Hundreds of individuals, some with their families, crossed over and encamped at Cassville and Springfield.²⁶ Many of the refugees promptly enlisted in the

Federal army, while others merely sought a safe haven where they could remain for the duration of the war. The large number of Arkansans who moved north provoked significant logistical problems. The feeding of such a concentration of emigrants was undertaken by the Western Sanitary Commission, a civilian organization established to relieve the suffering of the sick and wounded in the Union army. The Commission provided the newcomers with a modicum of foodstuffs and medicine when necessary, but was unable to lend any further assistance.²⁷

Meanwhile in Arkansas, which was still occupied by Confederate troops and sympathizers, a major change was in the offing. In November, 1862, the Federal commander in Missouri decided to confront the Confederate arsenal and troop assemblage at Yellville. It is alleged that the raid was inspired in part through information brought to General Curtis by James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok, then acting as a Union spy and later to become the legendary gunfighter of Dodge City, Kansas. During the subsequent attack on Yellville, the entire supply establishment along with its munitions and the nearby saltpeter works was destroyed. The incursion was an overwhelming success and effectively cleared north central Arkansas of southern troop concentrations.²⁸ But more important to the Buffalo River valley and surrounding area was the fact that the fall of Yellville meant the beginning of an extended period of lawlessness during which neither side exerted either political or military control. Into the resulting vacuum rushed criminal bands variously called Jayhawkers, Bushwhackers, and Boomers who maintained a common interest in murder, pillage, and the creation of general mayhem. Protected by the terrain in which they operated, the outlaws indiscriminately attacked isolated farmsteads in search of what meager valuables they could uncover.²⁹

From the latter months of 1862 until the end of the war, northwest Arkansas became the domain of lawless gangs. Comprised of loosely organized bands of brigands of both northern and southern persuasion, the motley groups terrorized the countryside seeking plunder and wrecking havoc among both those who cooperated with them and those who did not. The Jayhawkers were either local men who decided to capitalize on the confused and convulsed nature of the times or outlaws from Missouri and surrounding counties who found the area conducive to their type of banditry.³⁰ Jayhawker tales within the Arkansas Ozarks are myriad, and most illustrate the ruthless nature of the acts that spawned them. The motivation of many of the freebooters seems to have been either revenge or simply the acquisition of easy money. The bitterness engendered by the action of the state government to dispel the peace societies compelled those who were injured, physically or mentally, to seek retribution. And for loyal Southerners it was a chance to continue the work of ridding the country of the Union element. Whatever the intent, the results were usually the same.

The amount of damage to lives and property which occurred during the course of the war cannot be estimated, but the cumulative effect was to create an area in which fear, apprehension, and anxiety governed the daily existence of the remaining inhabitants. With most of the able-bodied adult men participating in the conflict on both sides, the women, children, and older citizens made prime targets for the outlaws.³¹ By the middle of 1864, the once peaceful valleys bore the scars of relentless marauding.

The condition of this country is and has been pitiable in the extreme; Confederate soldiers in nothing save the name, robbers and jayhawkers have vied with the Federals in plundering, devouring, and wasting the substance of loyal Southerners, and new cruelties have been devised to torture from unwilling lips the secret of some hidden treasure. The entire valley is swept bare of forage and subsistence, and there are hundreds of families that must suffer for bread.³²

Lawless bands continued their activities throughout the war and for several years after. Violence breeds violence, and as the number of victims increased, so too did the number of those who would eventually seek retribution. Isolated individual killings continued well into the 1870s before memories faded and time healed old wounds.³³

Although the Jayhawkers dominated the region of the Buffalo River during the later years of the Civil War, they shared the area with other independent units. Also operating in the Boston Mountains were irregular military forces composed of men who had served earlier in the war with a commissioned company and had either been furloughed, had their former unit disbanded, or had deserted and had returned to their home county retaining a desire to assist in the war effort. Southern groups, authorized by the Confederate general in charge of Arkansas, Thomas C. Hindman, shortly after the battle of Pea Ridge, operated as semi-official companies harassing regular forces of the Union army, attacking when they possessed superior numbers, and in general functioning much as guerrilla bands.³⁴

James Harrison Love, from Searcy County, commanded one of those independent companies. A Mexican War veteran, Love recruited two regular companies in his county for service in the Confederate army. He returned to the Buffalo River country in August, 1863, because of illness and was joined there by other men from the area, some of whom had served with him previously. Love and his men operated in the northwestern portion of the county and constituted a constant and serious threat to Union forces. Although usually numbering only a few dozen, Love's band

provided no little consternation to the opposition.³⁵ In May, 1864, Love and his followers joined General Sterling Price in Batesville and participated in the latter's unsuccessful raid into Missouri in the fall. As Price retreated back through Arkansas, his army melted away and the effectiveness of Love's group vanished as well as he no longer posed a threat after the autumn of that year.³⁶

Some of the independent companies that operated along the Buffalo River fought for the Union side. As early as 1862 in parts of northwestern Arkansas bands of Union sympathizers, forced to leave their homes, fled to the hills and succeeded in restricting the activities of Confederate units. Those "Mountain Feds.," also functioned as guerrilla forces and were especially strong in Newton County.³⁷ Led by James R. Vanderpool and using Jasper as their headquarters, they attempted to suppress Southern recruiting efforts in the county and often provided valuable information to organized Northern forces who scouted through the area. Vanderpool and his men proved to be such an irritant that in May, 1863, a Confederate force, led by a former sheriff of Newton County, John Cecil, launched a surprise raid on Jasper hoping to capture the guerrilla leader and eliminate a source of marked annoyance. Although some of the guerrillas were captured in the attack, Vanderpool, having been forewarned, escaped and continued his clandestine movements throughout the remainder of the war.³⁸

Official military activity within the Buffalo River valley consisted largely of reconnaissance expeditions and small inconsequential skirmishes, neither of which had any substantial effect upon the final outcome of the conflict. During the initial two years of the war, fighting in northwest Arkansas was relatively light. The battle of Pea Ridge was the major encounter not only in the highland region, but also in the state, and the Union victory there was followed by the occupation of Batesville and later movements into the central and southern parts of the state. Both sides tended to ignore the northwest highlands, and although there occurred limited activity during 1863,³⁹ the following year witnessed a marked increase in fighting along the Buffalo River.

Because the southern forces had retreated southward, Federal expeditions that moved through the valley confronted either the small bands of Jayhawkers or the more serious independent companies such as the one commanded by Captain Love. As previously noted, scattered skirmishes characterized clashes between the two opposing groups. The encounters, while of short duration involving a relatively small number of combatants, occasionally resulted in rather serious losses. During May, 1864, for example, a Confederate independent company captured a Federal supply train near the mouth of Richland Creek. Out of the 101 men guarding the wagons, thirty-seven were killed and

eleven wounded: a casualty rate of 48 percent.⁴⁰ Most of the engagements, however, resulted in many fewer losses.

An interesting facet of the war along the Buffalo was the mining among the numerous caves for potassium nitrate or saltpeter used in the making of gunpowder. From probably early 1862 perhaps a dozen different operations were conducted throughout the basin. Operated under the authority of the Confederate Niter and Mining Bureau established in April, 1862, the niter-works throughout Arkansas produced 17,000 pounds of niter prior to May of that year.⁴¹ It is unknown what percentage of the total was contributed by caves in northwest Arkansas, but it is unlikely that they produced a sizeable amount due to the comparatively small nature of their operation. Furthermore, after the fall of Yellville in November, 1862, the transportation risks greatly increased. Nevertheless, a number of the niter-works continued to operate after that date, and at least produced niter until March of 1864.⁴² Federal troops destroyed the mining facilities when they were discovered, but due to the nature of the terrain, detection was difficult.

The largest of the works was located on the upper Buffalo about a mile south of the present town of Boxley. The operation there consisted of fourteen permanent buildings, two steam engines, three boilers,⁴³ a large iron safe, and other assorted mining paraphernalia. Less extensive operations were conducted in different parts of the watershed, including one a few miles downstream from the Boxley works, one on lower Cave Creek also in Newton County, and others along Tomahawk and Big creeks in Searcy County.⁴⁴

By the end of the war the Buffalo River valley had become a desolate, ravaged, and forlorn area abandoned by many of its former inhabitants. Homes had been destroyed, livestock run off or stolen, fields neglected, and sizeable numbers of its residents killed. Because of the quantity of marauders, independent companies, and regular units that operated along the Buffalo, forage there was nonexistent. As early as March, 1864, the commander of a Federal force encamped at Yellville reported that there was no forage available within twenty miles of the town.⁴⁵ Jasper, Yellville, and Buffalo City had been either totally or partially destroyed by fire, and a large number of survivors were living in caves or other temporary shelters.⁴⁶ In late February, 1865, several hundred families from the Buffalo River area who had fled to southern Missouri sought permission to raise four companies of temporary troops for protection when they returned to the valley. Whether or not the request was granted is not known, but the tone of the appeal reflected the helplessness of the former inhabitants.⁴⁷ Those displaced settlers did not return to their homes and fields until after the war had officially ended in May, 1865, with the surrender of the Confederate commander of northern Arkansas, Brigadier General

Jefferson Thompson.⁴⁸

After that date the valley began to show signs of recovery. Homes were rebuilt, fields, long since overgrown with weeds, were cultivated anew, and fences, both physical and mental, were mended. Being an agricultural area, the Buffalo River region was not burdened with many of the problems encountered by more urban centers. But while the physical aspects of reconstruction were quickly dispensed with, the bitterness produced during the conflict was longer in dissipating. Nevertheless, within a few years the area had largely recovered from the four years of turmoil and had regained its former tranquility. The battle became then one with the earth rather than one with old animosities. Yet the region had changed.

The most significant difference which came over the river valley was a profound political shift. Prior to 1860 the three county region had voted nationally for the Democratic nominee. After the war two of the three counties became Republican strongholds. Beginning in 1876, if not earlier (the returns from Newton and Searcy counties for 1864, 1868, and 1872 are missing), both Searcy and Newton consistently returned a Republican ballot and at times were the only counties in the state to do so. During the period 1876 to 1944, those two counties voted for a Democratic president only twice: 1892 and 1932 for Newton, and 1884 and 1932 for Searcy. In 1912 both counties split their vote between William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt to the extent that the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, won both by a plurality. Marion County, meanwhile, constituted a surprising political aberration. Although the home of a large percentage of Arkansas' free blacks prior to the 1860 and seriously affected by the rigors of the war, Marion remained a Democratic stronghold, and between 1868 and 1944 voted for a Republican candidate only once: 1892.⁴⁹

Northwest Arkansas suffered during the Civil War as did the rest of the nation but with a marked difference: destruction was wrought not by invading armies but by numerous and autonomous bands of freebooters who swore allegiance to neither side -- or to both depending on the situation. The effectiveness of those groups was heightened by the surrounding terrain. Because of the rugged character of the land, it was difficult to search for or punish the outlaws. But just as the character of the land dictated that the Buffalo region would develop a subsistence economy and that that same country would harbor numerous fugitives and outlaws, so too would the land allow the inhabitants of the valley to recover quickly from the devastation and assume their former manner of existence. The Civil War marked a hiatus in the development of the Buffalo River valley, but following that disruption, began a period of expansion and increased population which would find its peak a half-century later during a mining boom which accompanied World War I.

NOTES

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3. Frank Moore, ed., The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, With Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, Etc., vol. I (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1862), Documents Section, p. 2.
4. Ibid., pp. 3-4.
5. James J. Johnston, "Letter of John Campbell, Unionist," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XXIX (Summer 1970), p. 178; Wooster, "The Arkansas Secession Convention," pp. 174, 183.
6. Although Campbell reversed his vote, he, along with Murphy, refused to sign "the devilish instrument." Johnston, "Letter of John Campbell," p. 181; Wooster, "The Arkansas Secession Convention," pp. 183-184.
7. Orville W. Taylor, Negro Slavery in Arkansas (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), pp. 49-50; United States, Census Bureau, [1860 Census], Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled From the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), p. 224.
8. Ted R. Worley, "The Arkansas Peace Society of 1861: A Study in Mountain Unionism," Journal of Southern History, XXIV (November 1958), p. 445.
9. Ted R. Worley, ed., "Documents Relating to the Arkansas Peace Society of 1861," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XVII (Spring 1958), p. 87; H.M. Rector to Jefferson Davis, November 28, 1861, in The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, vol. VIII (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), p. 699.
10. Worley, "Documents Relating to the Arkansas Peace Society of 1861," pp. 107-111.
11. Ibid., p. 82.
12. Rector to Davis, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. VIII, p. 699.

13. Ibid. Only 240 members, however, have been identified through extant documents. Worley, "Documents Relating to the Arkansas Peace Society of 1861," p. 82.
14. Solon Borland to A. Sidney Johnston, December 11, 1861, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. VIII, pp. 709-710.
15. Worley, "The Arkansas Peace Society," p. 447.
16. Ibid.; Noah Barnett to J.J. Johnston, September 6, 1863, James J. Johnston Private Collection, Marshall, Arkansas; A.W. Bishop, Loyalty on the Frontier, (Saint Louis: R.P. Studley & Company, 1863), pp. 128-129.
17. Bishop, Loyalty on the Frontier, p. 129.
18. Worley, "The Arkansas Peace Society," p. 450.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Barnett to Johnston, Johnston Collection.
22. Francis V. Greene, The Mississippi, vol. VIII in Campaigns of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882), p. 2.
23. Franz Sigel, "The Pea Ridge Campaign," in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, vol. I (New York: The Century Company, 1884), p. 314.
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25. Wiley Britton, The Civil War on the Border. A Narrative of Operations in Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas and the Indian Territory During the Years 1861-1862 Based Upon the Official Reports of the Federal Commanders Lyon, Sigel, Sturgis, Fremont, Halleck, Curtis, Schofield, Blunt, Herron and Totten, and of the Confederate Commanders McCulloch, Price, Van Dorn, Hindman, Marmaduke, and Shelby (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1890), pp. 383-384.
26. Bishop, Loyalty on the Frontier, pp. 11-12; Arkansas, Adjutant General, Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Arkansas, For the Period of the Late Rebellion, and to November 1, 1866, S. Misc. Doc. 53, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., Serial 1278, 1867, p. 1; James J. Johnston, "Searcy County, Arkansas During the Civil War," (typescript, Searcy County Library, Marshall, Arkansas), p. 97; Georgia L. Tatum, Disloyalty in the Confederacy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), pp. 38-39.

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28. S.C Turnbo, "Stories of the Ozarks: Accounts of Pioneer Life in Southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas in the Country Adjacent to the White River; Where the Pioneers Lived, How They Lived and Died and Where They are Buried and Particularly the Adventures of the First Settlers With the Wild Animals of those Regions---Buffaloes, Bears, Deer, Wolves, Panthers, Catamounts, Wildcats, Snakes, and Wild Turkeys," (typescript, J.N. Heiskell Collection, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Special Collections), I, p. 166; F.J. Herron to Samuel R. Curtis, November 29, 1862, War of the Rebellion, Serial I, vol. XXII, Part 1 (1888), p. 794; Richard O'Connor, Wild Bill Hickok (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 63.
29. Johnston, "Searcy County," pp. 46-47. While clear distinctions between the terms is impossible, jayhawkers usually applied to Federal irregulars and bushwhacker referred to Confederate guerrillas. Leo E. Huff, "Guerrillas, Jayhawkers and Bushwhackers in Northern Arkansas During the Civil War," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XXIV (Summer 1965), pp. 130-131.
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31. Ibid., p. 135; John Quincy Wolf, Life in the Leatherwoods, ed. by John Quincy Wolf, Jr. (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1974), p. 5; Evans, Arkansas, p. 167; John Hallum, Reminiscences of the Civil War (Little Rock: Tunnah and Pittard, Printers, 1903), p. 95; Mollie E. Williams, A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War: Forty-two Days in Search of a Missing Husband. A Lesson of Woman's Fidelity, Fortitude and Affection (Chicago: n.p., 1902), p. 15.
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33. Johnston, "Searcy County," pp. 127-128.
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April 23, 1864, ibid., pp. 886-887; J.B. Sanborn to J.E. Phelps, January 4, 1864, ibid., Part 2, pp. 21-22.

36. Johnston, "Searcy County," p. 150.

37. Arkansas, Adjutant General, Report, p. 203; Evans, Arkansas, pp. 93, 167; Wiley Britton, Memories of the Rebellion on the Border (Chicago: Cushing, Thomas & Co., Publishers, 1882), p. 441.

38. Evans, Arkansas, p. 166.

39. War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XII.

40. J.O. Phelps to J.B. Sanborn, May 10, 1864, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XXXIV, Part 1, p. 909.

41. I.M. St. John to G.W. Randolph, July 31, 1862, War of the Rebellion, Series IV, vol. II (1900), p. 29.

42. Record of Events, March 13, 1864, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XXXIV, Part 1, p. 640.

43. J.W. Caldwell to F.J. Herron, January 13, 1863, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XXII, Part 1, p. 214.

44. Ibid.; J.E. Phelps to J.B. Sanborn, February 16, 1864, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XXXIV, Part 1, p. 93; Johnston, "Searcy County," p. 55.

45. G.W. Murphy to J.B. Sanborn, March 28, 1864, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XXXIV, Part 2, p. 762.

46. James T. Smith, (Captain), "Report," Newton County Homestead, III (April 1961), p. 26; Turnbo, "Stories of the Ozarks," vol. I, p. 166; Yellville (Arkansas) Mountain Echo, June 28, 1939; Perry Case, "The Long Drive: A Cowboy's Own Story of his Experiences on the Trail From Texas to Chicago," American Heritage, XI (April 1960), p. 77.

47. J.W. Orr to Governor of Arkansas, February 21, 1865, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XLVIII, Part 1, (1896), pp. 931-932.

48. G.M. Dodge to J.A. Rawlins, May 12, 1865, War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XLVIII, Part 2, p. 419.

49. Herndon, The Arkansas Handbook, pp. 129-140.

IV

"...this lovely land...."
Post War Development

The years following the Civil War were prosperous ones for northwest Arkansas in general and for the Buffalo River country in particular. The cycle of economic good fortune which swept over the United States between 1865 and the beginning of the First World War was reflected in the optimism and relative prosperity of the inhabitants of the Arkansas highlands. Population increased, additional land was cleared and cultivated, crop production expanded, and towns displayed the outward signs of social, cultural, and economic progression. By the end of the century, the Buffalo River valley, while still plagued with poor transportation routes, could no longer be classified a part of the American frontier and exuded an optimism characteristic of developing regions.

In our section we offer many attractive inducements. Our soil is fertile, and aided by a moist climate, is exceedingly productive, and he who plants is sure to reap. The climate is brilliant with sunshine, and frequent and timely rains and a moist gulf breeze tempers the atmosphere so the heat is never oppressive, nor the cold severe, and the rainfall is very evenly distributed.¹

The near pastoral utopia suggested here was more imagined than real and certainly differed from Timothy Flint's appraisal of seventy-five years earlier; nevertheless, by the time it was written (1902), the valley was nearing its peak in prosperity and population. The prosperity, however, was relative, and the population, although it had doubled since 1860, remained less than 36,000.²

As the harried inhabitants of the river began rebuilding their economy and their society after the war and the immigration of newcomers grew apace, farms were re-established and a diversity of crops were harvested. Thirty years after the resumption of settlement, the average improved acreage per farm had grown from twenty-one in 1860 to thirty-four.³ Buffalo River farmers grew wheat, corn, cotton, potatoes, oats, and even some tobacco and rice. But during the second half of the nineteenth century, cotton inexplicably became the major crop. The 1880s constituted the boom years in the harvesting of that fiber crop. In 1886 the Harrison Times reported that "Cotton seems to be the principal crop through the Buffalo Creek country and looks even better than usual at this season."⁴ The cotton gins throughout the valley were busy processing and baling the fiber. By

November, 1886, the gin at Marble City, now a tourist attraction called Dogpatch U.S.A., had processed 200 bales and was looking forward to a record year.⁵ But by the 1890s the region's affair with the soil sapping plant seemed over. Diversity was needed if the Buffalo River earth was to produce successfully enough to sustain its growing population. In 1899 the Searcy County newspaper, the Marshall Mountain Wave, admonished:

Everybody acknowledges that the more cotton a farmer raises the poorer he gets. Yet it seems the poorer he gets the more surely he is to plant cotton. Sow wheat and oats, plant corn, potatoes and a little of everything....⁶

An important corollary to the newspaper's formula for agricultural success was to "Go to church on Sunday, have your wife wash on Monday, take the Wave and in ten years you will be well off."⁷ While the efficacy of this advice may be questionable, the move toward crop diversification was imperative. The Buffalo bottom land could support a small family with basic foodstuffs, but continued concentration on a single cash crop such as cotton would have been ruinous to the economy as well as to the land. Because of the poor condition of the soil, falling cotton prices, and inadequate transportation facilities, a shift to diversified farming became evident by 1900. By the turn of the century the mountain farmer along the Buffalo raised wheat for bread and corn for feed. When his wheat crop failed, he resorted to corn bread for sustenance and raised some cotton to gain a little extra cash to purchase the few essentials he could not produce on his land. Those indispensable items included salt, coffee, sugar, soda, horseshoes, cotton and woolen cloth, and household goods such as dishes, crocks, and canning jars. Those products had to be imported by "careful freighters" from Springfield, Missouri, Russellville and Plumerville, Arkansas (both of which are on the Arkansas River), or later from Eureka Springs.⁸

Getting their surplus crops to market was also no minor undertaking for the settlers of the narrow valley. Poor roads continued to be their nemesis. The danger of wagons rolling off the narrow and rough paths which served as roads was constant.⁹ Surplus goods were usually transported by wagon to Springfield, Missouri to be exchanged there for a few necessities. But the Missouri merchants apparently believed they had a closed market on the goods from the Arkansas Ozarks and, consequently, made a handsome profit at the expense of the farmers. The Buffalo homesteaders finally decided to break with tradition and seek markets elsewhere.

Thus on a cold January morning in 1880, around 200 wagons congregated near the mouth of Richland Creek in Searcy County and began a slow trek up that creek across the Boston Mountains to

TABLE 3
 POPULATION: 1870 - 1980
 (Percent of increase)

	<u>MARION</u>	<u>NEWTON</u>	<u>SEARCY</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1870	3,979 (-35.7)	4,374 (28.9)	5,614 (6.5)	13,967
1880	7,907 (98.7)	6,120 (39.9)	7,278 (29.6)	21,305
1890	10,390 (31.4)	9,950 (62.6)	9,664 (32.8)	30,004
1900	11,377 (9.5)	12,538 (26)	11,988 (24)	35,903
1910	10,203 (-10.3)	10,612 (-15.4)	14,825 (23.7)	35,640
1920	10,154 (-.5)	11,199 (5.5)	14,590 (-15.9)	35,943
1930	8,876 (-12.6)	10,564 (-5.7)	11,056 (-24.2)	30,496
1940	9,464 (6.6)	10,881 (3)	11,942 (8)	32,287
1950	8,609 (-9)	8,685 (-20.2)	10,424 (-12.7)	27,718
1960	6,041 (-29.8)	5,963 (-31.3)	8,124 (-22.1)	20,128
1970	7,000 (15.9)	5,844 (-2)	7,731 (-4.8)	20,575
1980	11,334 (61.9)	7,756 (32.7)	8,874 (14.4)	27,964

SOURCE: Compiled from decennial census returns as listed in the bibliography.

Russellville on the Arkansas River. The wagon train arrived less than two weeks after negotiating eighty miles of winding Ozark roads. By the time of its arrival, the train had grown to include 300 wagons and stretched over a distance of fourteen miles. The caravan illustrated the marketing problems faced by the farmers along the Buffalo, and although the event was greatly publicized and the immediate results profited the participants, a faster route to the Arkansas was still years in the future.¹⁰

Because of the time and distance involved in reaching the Russellville markets, the settlers reverted to hauling their produce to the nearest railhead at Springfield and later at Eureka Springs. Joining forces several times a year, the farmers would form a train of fifteen or more wagons to make the five- to eight-day round trip.¹¹ Yet they remained far from satisfied.

The last three decades of the nineteenth century were marked by increased agitation among the farmers of the United States who believed themselves oppressed and persecuted by unfair railroad rates, unjust banking regulations, and increased taxes. Beginning in the late 1860s, farmers' organizations appeared throughout the East, Midwest, and South. The first of those agricultural associations was organized in 1867 and titled the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, popularly recognized as simply the Grange. Although Granger locals appeared in Arkansas during the early 1870s there is no evidence to indicate that the movement had a following along the Buffalo River.

A later farm organization that was popular within the watershed was founded in 1882 in Prairie County, Arkansas on the lower White River. Termed the Agricultural Wheel, the organization initially amounted to a form of debating club that developed political and economic overtones. Additional "Wheels" sprung up in other Arkansas counties, and the following year a state organization arose. By 1885 when the Wheel merged with another farm order, the Brothers of Freedom, the combined membership amounted to around 40,000 in Arkansas. Two years later a greatly expanded Wheel counted 500,000 members in eight states.¹² In 1889 the Wheel merged with the larger Southern Farmers' Alliance, a regional organization with a following throughout the South.¹³

Along the Buffalo, Agricultural Wheel lodges were established as early as 1883 and prospered for at least a decade. Searcy County had active organizations of both the Wheel and the Brothers of Freedom at Snowball, Marshall, Witts Springs, and other locations.¹⁴ Interest in the movement continued along the Buffalo. By 1892 when the Marshall Mountain Wave commenced publication in Searcy County, its first announcement showed the strength of the farmers' movement. It would "be free from absurdity and bring forward the true purposes of the Farmers Alliance...."¹⁵ Although the local agricultural lodges continued

to gain in popularity into the 1890s, it does not seem that they constituted a fundamental motivating force in the general life of the Buffalo River inhabitants. Even the intent of the Mountain Wave's initial pronouncement became lost as interest in farming associations dissipated.

From its inception, the Arkansas Wheel had participated in politics, and in the state elections made an impressive showing.¹⁶ The various lodges within the basin, however, evinced divergent attitudes toward politics. In Newton County, the Wheel in 1886 won the entire county slate with only one exception.¹⁷ Nevertheless, in Marion County a meeting of the Wheel that same year decided that "the organization in this county would take no part in politics as a body."¹⁸ While the various national farmers' associations united in 1892 into a third political party, it appears that after 1895 interest in Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties turned away from farm grievances and toward the exploitation of the mineral wealth along the river.

Indeed, it would have been unusual if the organizational activity had continued. The prevailing concern of the various Wheels and Alliances was to obtain more equitable treatment from the transportation and economic facilities upon which they were dependent. As the farms along the Buffalo were not dependent on world market prices, the farmers' need for the agricultural protest organizations was substantially, and almost inherently, limited.

During the later years of the nineteenth century, the most profitable industry along the river was lumbering. While saw mills were common on the tributaries of the Buffalo since the advent of the first settlers, production for "outside" use began only during the 1870s. Representatives of the Houston, Ligett, and Canada Cedar Company, the Consolidated Lumber Company, and later the A.L. Hayes Stave Company, and the Eagle Pencil Company among others, entered the region between 1875 and 1920 to negotiate for and supervise the cutting and marketing of the cedar, walnut, and oak trees which grew in profusion along the bluffs and ridges of the valley.¹⁹ Because the railroad did not enter the valley until 1902, the river provided the early means of transporting the logs to market. After an extended cutting season lasting several months, the logs were dumped into the river during flood stage, hastily organized into a raft for the journey downstream to the White River, and eventually reached the lumber yard at Batesville.²⁰ The largest cedar float on record consisted of 175,000 logs and required twenty-two days to complete.²¹ The floating of the logs was a chaotic and hectic time which provided a great deal of excitement as well as pecuniary remuneration to the local farmers.

By 1920 most of the easily accessible cedar and walnut stands were gone, and the industry ceased its operations. The



Rafting logs on the Buffalo, 1890s [Credit: Stella Mason, St. Joe, Arkansas]

decline of the lumber industry along the river can be attributed to two essential factors: transportation and the lack of a foresighted timber management policy. A constant problem was the difficulty of transporting the logs to market. Because the river could be used only during periods of high water, timber shipment was at best intermittent. Although the establishment of the railroad in 1902 allowed logs to be shipped from the more convenient location at Gilbert, it remained a cumbersome procedure. More important was the fact that the early logging companies cut where it was most profitable -- among the large concentrated stands of cedar and walnut. Such indiscriminate practices of harvesting timber, while eminently practical at the time, deprived the lumber interests of a dependable source of selected mature trees in succeeding years. The short-lived lumber boom became a victim in part of its own shortsighted policy. Thus while scattered independent lumber operations continued, their contribution to the valley's economy remained negligible.



Saw Mill, Searcy County, ca. 1890s [Credit: Maurice Tudor, Marshall, Arkansas]

Throughout the nineteenth century, poor transportation routes continued to plague the hillfolk. Early roads followed either the narrow benches atop the ridges or the undependable path of the creek bottoms. The river roads were usually the most expedient course, but a sudden spring shower often not only prevented their use because of flooding, but also caused extensive damage to the roads themselves. Traffic was reinstated only after the farmers joined together and repaired the eroded trail.²²

The laws of the state of Arkansas provided that local residents should contribute their own time and equipment for the upkeep of the roads. The state required all males between eighteen and forty-five to work on the "public highways" as much as five days a year but no more than two days at any one time.²³ Apparently some residents took the repair of their roads seriously. In 1898, for instance, William Woodward of Searcy County was fined ten dollars for failing to work his allotted time.²⁴ In many instances, however, the road work was voluntary, and communal effort was considered simply a part of the price of Ozark life. Although the road problem continued well into the twentieth century, county roads gradually improved to the point where they were at least passable without endangering life and limb. A continuous obstacle to normal channels of transportation remained the river.

From earliest times, the Buffalo River could neither be harnessed nor controlled. Heavy rains regularly sent it on a raging rampage which disrupted any type of intercourse between the valley settlements. The periodic floods, as Timothy Flint had warned, were not to be trifled with. A cloudburst upstream could cause a flash flood in a relatively short time. Records of such occurrences were not maintained until the twentieth century, but since 1915 the Buffalo has risen from its normal level of around four feet to heights of better than thirty-five feet at least six times. And in August of 1915, the river crested after an exceptional rainfall at fifth-four feet.²⁵ Even slight fluctuations in the river's level often disrupted normal communication. Dependent on ferries to cross the stream, local residents were keenly aware that after a heavy rain, crossing the Buffalo might be either impossible or extremely difficult. Notices such as the following regularly graced the pages of the county newspapers.

But on finding Sunday morning that much rain had fallen we determined to try to recross Buffalo, before it might become impassable; but on arriving at that stream we found it 'booming.' Ye editor got across in a canoe; but we left Mr. Lay on the other side with the team until it could be ferried over.²⁶

Until bridges were built across the river, beginning in the

1930s, such interruptions continued.

The periodic rises in the river, while they might disrupt land transportation, worked to further communication by water. Although no regular system of water transportation ever took place on the Buffalo, the stream was used periodically for the conveyance of goods. Flatboats and rafts constituted the principal modes of river travel. Owing to the fluctuations in the river's level and the large number of shoals which would be encountered, the use of larger vessels was impossible except under high-water conditions. With the advent of mining on the Buffalo, barges were utilized to transport the ore to the railhead on the White River. But only a few such trips were made as most of the minerals were taken out by wagon. Water transportation in the region continued to be limited to the White.²⁷

Indeed, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the principal means of access to the eastern end of the Buffalo River valley was by steamboat. Those vessels had been prominent on the lower White from the early 1830s, but none ascended the river above Batesville until 1844 when a steamer delivered a load of freight at the mouth of the Big North Fork Creek at the present site of Norfork, Arkansas.²⁸ Following the Civil War, steamboats made regular runs from Batesville to Buffalo City which marked the northernmost point for safe river travel, and occasionally paddled farther up the river.²⁹ Most of the steamboats which plied the upper White were modest in size and functional in their furnishings. A typical upper White River craft possessed a carrying capacity of one hundred bales of cotton and measured eighteen feet in width and eighty-five in length.³⁰ The range of those vessels was limited, however, to the White.

Only once did one attempt to ascend the Buffalo for any distance. That daring maneuver took place in 1896 when the steamboat Dauntless, captained by William T. Warner, pushed up the river as far as Rush Creek with a load of mining machinery. Encountering overhanging tree limbs which snagged on the vessel's smokestacks and shallow water which necessitated winching the boat over numerous shoals, the Dauntless arrived at its destination after a two-day struggle, unloaded its cargo, and immediately began the return trip. The epic voyage of Captain Warner and his craft marked the high point in transportation on the Buffalo, and within a few years even the steamboat trade along the White would be superseded by the coming of the railroad.³¹

The journey of the Dauntless, however, stimulated interest in the idea of regular packet travel on the Buffalo at least as far as the Rush Creek mining district. Such an enterprise required improvement of the stream's channel by the removal of

overhanging tree limbs and the clearing of numerous rock shoals. Earlier interest in improving water transportation on the White River led to the modification of the great shoals at the mouth of the Buffalo when the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a series of spur-dikes in 1880 which increased the water level at the shallowest points and allowed an increase in river travel above Buffalo City.³²

Yet prior to the 1896 trip of the Dauntless, very little thought had been given to the improvement of the Buffalo itself. Following that journey, the engineer officer in charge of improvements on the upper White received orders to complete a survey of the Buffalo from its mouth to the mouth of Rush Creek. The survey, which occurred during December 1896, concluded that to make the river navigable at all stages would require a system of five locks and dams costing \$750,000. Recognizing that the commerce of the area would not justify the huge expenditure, William Sibert, the surveyor in command, recommended an auxiliary plan whereby the overhanging timber would be cut, and the rock outcroppings above the general plane of the stream bed would be removed. This more moderate alteration of the river Sibert estimated would cost around \$3,500.³³ The work was evidently commenced and by the turn of the century, the local press could claim that "boats can ascend the Buffalo River, on about the same stage of water as they can the White river."³⁴ The anticipated influx of vessels never occurred, however, due to the unpredictable level of the stream. The primary course of transportation remained the wagon roads.

Calling into question the use of "remote" and "primitive" when describing the Arkansas Ozarks, the growth of highland society during the second half of the nineteenth century included the appearance of social and intellectual entities that were enjoyed by at least a portion of the populace. Schools, debating societies, bands, and newspapers sprung up throughout the watershed. Although public schools probably did not appear until after the Civil War, by 1900 such institutions had effectively reduced the illiteracy rate to one half that recorded in 1850.³⁵ In addition to the schools, several towns boasted of private academies which offered instruction in subjects ranging from orthography to physiography to land surveying.³⁶

Another sign of cultural development was the organization of town bands. As early as 1883 Yellville had obtained instruments and had begun the establishment of its county band. Marshall followed suit, and by the turn of the century, all three of the county seats were being entertained regularly by their group of local musicians.³⁷ The existence of debating societies, particularly in Newton County, further challenge Ozark stereotypes.³⁸



Picnic, Diamond Cave Spring, ca. 1910 [Credit: Ardella Vaughan, Jasper, Arkansas]

Perhaps the leading sign of economic and social growth was the establishment of local newspapers. The Buffalo valley was barren of a locally published paper until the decade of the 1880s when a weekly was begun in each county. Most of the early journals enjoyed only a brief existence before they folded or moved to another location. By 1920 at least eighteen newspapers had, from time to time, been published within the watershed. Beginning in 1884 both Newton and Searcy counties produced a weekly, the Jasper American and the New Era respectively.³⁹ Two years later the Mountain Echo made its appearance from Yellville and emerged as the paper with the greatest longevity: it remains the only paper published in the Marion County seat today.⁴⁰ Among the many transient weeklies appeared several decidedly Republican newspapers. Ulysses Bratton founded the Marshall Republican in 1890, and after a host of different editors tried their hands at managing it, the paper was consolidated in 1945 with the current Marshall newspaper, the Mountain Wave.⁴¹ In 1891 the Newton Herald began publishing from Jasper, and reportedly carried as its motto, "In God and the Republican Party We Trust, Everybody Else Cash."⁴² But the hillfolk along the

Buffalo River were not limited to reading only the local county papers. Occasionally they subscribed to sources of information as the Atlanta Constitution and the St. Louis Republic and Globe Democrat.⁴³ It was the local papers, however, that most embodied and reflected the views and aspirations of the farmers along the river.

Without exception the fledgling weeklies pledged themselves to sing the praises of the possibilities which the valley afforded. While all advertised the virtues of Ozark life and extolled the advantages offered, none surpassed the Mountain Educator when in 1893 it proclaimed:

Never can there be a place more worthy of affection or deserving of praise, than this lovely land. Her productions are as diversified as her soil, and the virtues of her people as pure as her pearly brooks. Galconda's sparkling gems cannot outshine her natural resources, nor India's coral strand present more beauties. Well have the poets and the bards sung praises to Grecian hills. Switzer's mountains and Scottish shores have been the theme of many songs. English Druids have praised their sacred graves, but when the bard of Searcy county appears, the theme will still be unexhausted. Let him sing her praises to the world, for a country so rich in nature, only wants time.⁴⁴

Along with the newspapers, various books were also circulated among the settlers. The most common were almanacs, Dr. Gunn's Domestic Medicine, journals such as the American Agriculturist, and, of course, the Holy Bible.⁴⁵

Indeed, for many, few facets of frontier life were as important as frontier religion. Soon after their arrival, the initial settlers constructed rude structures which served both as a place of worship and as a local meeting house. As the century progressed, the dual purpose of the church was retained although the character of the structures was much improved. Quite often they assumed a multi-purpose function. The church on Cave Creek in Newton County was "well constructed of hewn pine logs, and two stories; the lower room was used for church and school purposes, the upper story for a Masonic Lodge."⁴⁶ But while religion may have been an ever present element in frontier society, participation in a particular sect was not. While practically everyone considered himself a Protestant, there was very little further distinction made along denominational lines, and few were active in a particular church. A religious enumeration taken in 1906 revealed that fully 80 percent of the inhabitants within the Buffalo River valley did not consider themselves a member of a specific religious denomination. In fact, only 20.3 percent in Searcy County, 13.7 percent in Marion, and 13.2 percent of the

population in Newton professed any allegiance to an organized church.⁴⁷

Interestingly enough, the domination of religious life by the Methodist Church which was evident around 1860 had been replaced by the prevalence of no particular sect by the turn of the century. The Methodist Church retained its former influence only in Marion County where 44 percent of the inhabitants who declared any affiliation were Methodist; but the Baptists constituted a close second by registering almost 40 percent of the declared population. In Searcy County the role of the two religions was reversed: the Baptists claimed 46.8 percent of the church-going populace while the Methodists reported a total of 35 percent. The settlers in Newton County shunned both of those organized religions as 43 percent announced membership in the Disciples of Christ, with the Baptists constituting a distant second with 16 percent.⁴⁸ The total dominance of Protestantism was disrupted only in Searcy County where in 1906 there were eighty Roman Catholics who formed 3 percent of the county's church attending populace.⁴⁹



River baptizing near Jasper, 1934 [Credit: Ardella Vaughan, Jasper, Arkansas]

Yet the strong showing of the Methodists was not to the satisfaction of the Arkansas state church organization. The Ozarks posed formidable problems for the permanent establishment of a viable and active Methodist organization. Its episcopal polity constituted a severe handicap in the Arkansas highlands - a hindrance not suffered by the congregationally organized sects such as the Baptist and Church of Christ. To the individuals in charge of establishing a Methodist following in the hills, the initial stumbling block was the hillfolk themselves. Characterized by "independence, self-reliance, individuality, which often runs to accentricity [sic]," it was difficult "to organize them, on the one hand, and make for strong personalities, once you get hold of them, on the other hand."⁵⁰ In addition, the topography of the plateau served to harass those who were sent to establish effective and permanent Methodist organizations. As late as 1935 the state organization lamented that more had not been accomplished among the mountaineers within the Boston Mountains.⁵¹

The very highlands which served to obstruct the Methodists, however, provided a strong attraction to one emigrant religious denomination. Beginning in 1920 and continuing into the early months of 1925, the small village of Gilbert in Searcy County was the site of an incursion of a millennialist sect from Illinois. Organized in 1912, the Incoming Kingdom Missionary Unit was the creation of John A. Battenfield a Christian Church minister who believed that he had discovered the millennial prophecies of the Bible. First expounding his theory in The Great Demonstration, published in 1912, Battenfield revealed that the millennium would begin only after a world-wide war between Catholics and Protestants, and that to survive the holocaust his followers must establish faithful communities in the isolated mountainous regions of the country and attempt to restore the true church. After months of searching, Battenfield established one of those communities at Gilbert.⁵²

Gilbert had been founded around 1902 as a railroad construction camp for the Missouri and North Arkansas Railroad which eventually ran from Joplin, Missouri to Helena, Arkansas.⁵³ Battenfield and his followers quickly erected a school/church building and began the publication of a newspaper, the Kingdom Harbinger. As the religious constituency of the community grew, the members began to reach out to surrounding communities to warn them of the approaching holocaust and converts were found in Bruno, St. Joe, Witts Springs, and Maumee. The number of colonists continued to grow for several years as the small group attempted to increase its economic self-sufficiency. But by the middle of 1925, the experiment had ended. The organization, held together principally through the personality of John Battenfield, disintegrated when the oracular pastor lost control of his flock, abandoned the Buffalo River town, and headed east to Washington, D.C. The circumstances behind his abrupt exit stemmed from his

prophecy in February 1925 that he would raise from the dead a recently deceased member of the church. Upon his failure to produce the predicted resurrection, the minister announced that he had suffered a nervous breakdown. Following a short period of rest at the home of a friend, Battenfield left for the East, and the abandoned and disheartened followers shortly thereafter also made their exit.⁵⁴ Without the enthusiastic motivation of its religious mentor, the community of Gilbert was reduced to the quiet and peaceful village it is today.

For those who lived along the Buffalo during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, however, the peaceful and harmonious existence was not absolute. The tranquility associated with the pastoral life of the homesteaders regularly was marred by intermittent acts of violence. Murders, if not commonplace, were a periodic occurrence. When Joe Willborn disemboweled William Jameson during a fox hunt on the Buffalo, it was "supposed that bad women and a too generous outpouring of whiskey were the supreme causes."⁵⁵ In Newton County along Cave Creek, the Smith-Nichols' feud during 1882 caused a considerable amount of excitement, but interest lagged when the Smiths made a hasty departure and took refuge in the protection of the wooded mountains.⁵⁶ The following year a correspondent for the Harrison Times complained that there had been four murders in Newton County during the year, and no one had been apprehended. "The murderers and thieves retreat to the mountains where they are fed and protected by those who have little interest in or respect for the laws of society or our country."⁵⁷ Indeed, the mountains had regularly offered a haven for refugees from the law, and northwest Arkansas constituted an excellent environment for such seclusion. The lightly populated Buffalo River country was even the site of refuge for one Newton County resident who claimed to be Frank James, brother of the infamous outlaw Jesse James. Whether the assertion was apocryphal or not, it illustrates the secluded nature of the area surrounding the Buffalo River.⁵⁸

Disrespect for the law was reiterated in 1893 when a former sheriff of Seely County killed one Henry Fryar in the river village of Woolum, a settlement noted locally for its habitual disorderly nature.⁵⁹ A few years later in Jasper, four sticks of explosives were detected under the jail after a grand jury failed to indict a man suspected of killing his wife. The dynamite was "evidently placed there with the intention of making short work" of the accused.⁶⁰ Other crimes upon the persons and property of the hillfolk ranged from arson to profanity to Sabbath breaking to selling liquor to a minor and to insulting a teacher. The last named deed caused Bob Harrington to be fined twenty-five dollars.⁶¹ In addition, there were instances of adultery. In 1882 a Newton County farmhand eloped with his employer's wife and left the following note: "I have tooked your woman, but you ar welcum to my last weeks wages, which I didn't draw; and I hoap that squares things."⁶² As in most mountainous and densely

wooded areas in rural America during the late 1800s, a recurring problem concerned the illegal distillation of "mountain spirits."

The history of illegal whiskey-making in the well-wooded and watered "hollers" of the southern Appalachians is both long and exciting; that back-woods enterprise associated with the Ozarks is no different. The making of "moonshine" was not always against the law. Except for the years 1791-1802 and for a few years following the War of 1812 when a federal excise tax on whiskey was collected, such activities were common, profitable, and completely legal. But beginning in 1862 it became a federal offense to distill alcohol without a federal permit.⁶³ Even though the legislation had no effect in Arkansas until 1868 when the state's representatives were readmitted to Congress, little heed was paid the law. Hillfolk long accustomed to being isolated and relatively insulated from the legal whims of their urban brothers continued, without federal authorization, to produce corn whiskey in secluded wild-cat stills.

In 1896 a Newton County resident reported that he could stand at his front door and observe smoke from seven different stills being operated in defiance of the law.⁶⁴ Southern Newton and Searcy counties in particular, with their densely wooded, almost inaccessible ravines, harbored many illicit stills. Prosecutions were few and sentences relatively light as the crafty mountaineers attempted to outwit the revenue agents.⁶⁵ In addition to the illegal stills, there were a number of officially licensed distilleries, which also operated in the narrow valleys where there was an abundance of fresh cold water. In 1893 talk of moving one such distillery from St. Joe to Woolum in Searcy County prompted the local press to denounce emphatically the enterprise as "This venomous [sic] reptile, the cyclone of destruction to mankind."⁶⁶ Apparently the readers of the paper heartily agreed with the opinions of the editor because in 1901 the county court at Marshall decided the town would have a brighter future if saloons were not permitted to operate within the city limits -- a decision reached almost twenty years before national prohibition went into effect.⁶⁷

By the dawn of the new century, the face of the Buffalo River country had changed considerably. The despair which characterized the region following the Civil War had gone, and a wave of relative prosperity had settled over the valley. In 1898 Searcy County could boast of having 1,004 carriages and a surprisingly high number of pianos -- thirty-four.⁶⁸ Two years later during the compilation of the twelfth census, Marshall recorded a total of 263 inhabitants while Yellville consisted of a bustling 578.⁶⁹

In another respect as well, the character of the country had changed. Following the Civil War practically the entire black population left for more promising environs. From a high of 386,

including both slaves and the eight remaining free Negroes in 1860, the number of blacks dropped to around sixty Freedmen ten years later and remained at that level for the balance of the century.⁷⁰ The exodus of most of the blacks was probably due to the absence of money to pay them wages and the small need for tenancy on the hill country farms. Those who stayed following their emancipation evidently had maintained favorable relations with their owners and considered their home to be the valley of the Buffalo. Yet even they soon became a rarity among the small villages. By 1893 the Marshall newspaper found it newsworthy that "A real live negro was in town last Friday night."⁷¹ And four years later the same publication noted that "A colored man passed through town Monday," which is such an usual occurrence that it deserves mention."⁷² It is noteworthy that no evidence survives to indicate that intolerant whites forced the exodus of the blacks from the Buffalo River country. It would seem, instead, that this was caused by a lack of economic opportunity.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the basin of the Buffalo River was almost entirely inhabited by white American-born farmers who considered themselves members of the Protestant faith. That homogeneity remained essentially intact even though the region for the next twenty years experienced an intense and chaotic period of mining activity which introduced new interests and capital into the valley.

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V

LEAD AND ZINC MINING

The history of lead and zinc mining in northern Arkansas is primarily the study of an area that possessed considerable mineral deposits but only limited transportation facilities. In 1858 a state geologist prophesied that Arkansas was destined to "take the lead of all Western States, in her resources of zinc and manganese," and that the state also promised to "afford considerable lead ore."¹ The industry developed slowly throughout the nineteenth century, but during the First World War it appeared that the prediction would be realized. Zinc and lead production peaked in Arkansas in 1917, and the Buffalo River country played an important role in that production. The prosperity was short-lived, however, and the industry quickly declined.

While zinc was the more sought after mineral following the turn of the century, lead had been the subject of explorations and speculations for two hundred years. Shortly after the beginning of the eighteenth century, while France was commencing the settlement of the Louisiana territory, there occurred a short fever of interest in possible wealth in the Mississippi valley. Hungry for the kind of New World wealth that had brought riches to Spain, Frenchmen were eagerly credulous of rumors about any kind of ore deposits. On the presumptive basis of such unfounded reports, the fantastic manipulator John Law, a clever Scotsman, promulgated a scheme to reduce the French national debt while at the same time exploiting the dreamed-of riches of Louisiana. Law's company was given the rights to Louisiana; under its direction Jean Baptiste le Moyne, Sieur d'Bienville, was appointed the territory's governor, colonization was pushed, and efforts were made to discover natural resources. But Law's entire scheme -- bank, bank notes, and company -- based as it was on credit and inflated paper currency, was not to last. In 1720 the highly overblown "Mississippi Bubble" burst as conservative investors asked that their stock be redeemed in coin. The fragile economic foundation of the enterprise began to crumble, and as confidence gave way to doubt and then disbelief, the highly speculative project collapsed, and Law made a hasty exit to Belgium.² But the adventure was not without its achievements. In 1718 the strategically located city of New Orleans was founded, and expeditions sent to the interior of Louisiana located lead mines in what is today southern Missouri.³

Suffering under the delusion that rich silver and gold mines existed in Upper Louisiana, Law's company sent to that region a group of miners and assayers under the direction of Francis

Renault. Although the company ended in financial ruin, Renault and his associates continued their search for the suspected precious metals, and in 1724-1725 the "director-general of the mines of Louisiana" discovered and opened in southeastern Missouri a number of lead deposits which he expected would yield silver ore. Although no silver appeared, Renault continued to explore with great expectations. Throughout the century, the mines, most of which were the open pit variety, were worked intermittently with varying results.⁴ But it was not until 1798, after Moses Austin petitioned for a grant of land which would encompass the mines, that the deposits were operated with any consistency. Austin moved his family from Virginia to Missouri where he constructed a saw mill, flour mill, furnace, and factory for the manufacture of both shot and sheet lead. The Virginian prospered in southeastern Missouri and elevated the lead mining business of the region to a permanent year-round industry. The success of the endeavor stalled, however, during the War of 1812 and the Panic of 1819. Austin subsequently faced financial ruin and made plans to recover his fortune by colonizing Texas -- plans which were realized only after his death by his son Stephen F. Austin.⁵

As the Missouri mining enterprise was declining, Henry R. Schoolcraft led an expedition through the lead region of Missouri, into northern Arkansas, and finally along the White River as far as Batesville before he turned east toward the Mississippi. In Arkansas, Schoolcraft noted the existence of a number of lead deposits in Marion County and farther east in Lawrence County, but because of the sparse population in the Arkansas territory at that time (1818), none of these deposits were being worked.⁶ Sixteen years later G. W. Featherstonhaugh, a geologist for the United States, visited the region east of the White River and observed that enough lead existed in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas that "it may be relied on for countless ages as a source of national wealth."⁷

The only working lead mine mentioned by Featherstonhaugh was located on the Strawberry River in the region of north Arkansas east of the Buffalo River.⁸ Mining ventures there must have been operated by local settlers in the search for material for musket balls, as no commercial mining took place in north central Arkansas until the early 1850s when several reduction plants were constructed in the vicinity of Lead Hill in Boone County.⁹

During the later years of that pre-Civil War decade, the Arkansas state legislature authorized the governor to make arrangements for a geological survey of the state. Governor E. N. Conway obtained the services of David Dale Owen who at the time was supervising a similar survey for the state of Kentucky. As State Geologist of the State of Arkansas, Owen traveled the state during 1857 and 1858 and made a study for which he received \$1,800 for the first year's work and \$2,500 for the second.¹⁰

Published in Little Rock, Owen's report confirmed the existence of large amounts of lead in the northwestern portion of the state, particularly in the Buffalo River region where he reported the extraction of sixty to seventy pounds of lead ore from a forty-five foot shaft near the mouth of Cave Creek.¹¹ Owen's assistant, Edward T. Cox, who conducted a similar survey during 1859-1860, found an even more extensive mining operation on the headwaters of the Buffalo in Newton County where eighteen to twenty thousand pounds of the ore had been removed.¹²

During the Civil War the increased demand for lead for munitions stimulated activity in the area. The Cave Creek deposits especially were worked by Confederate forces, but it was not until the 1870s that lead mining on a large scale was introduced into the Buffalo River basin.¹³ In 1876 the Boston Mountain Mining and Smelting Company, an organization which originated in Illinois, operated a mine on Cave Creek for a period of two years before it sold out to the Granby Mining and Smelting Company. Wagon teams hauled the smelted lead to Russellville and where it was shipped to Pennsylvania.¹⁴ Other mines were operated throughout the 1870s with varying degrees of success. As the decade of the 1880s began, however, interest in lead began to decrease in direct proportion to an increased awareness of the extent of zinc concentrations in the area.

The commercial development of zinc in northern Arkansas first occurred in Sharp County near Calamine in 1857 and later in 1871. Although smelters had been constructed during both periods, the activity was of short duration.¹⁵ Then in the early 1880s John Wolfer, one of the foremost prospectors along the Buffalo, and several of his associates located a large deposit of zinc on Rush Creek in southern Marion County. Although denied in later years by Wolfer, tradition maintained that the prospectors believed that the zinc carbonate was actually silver ore. The anxious men then allegedly had the ore assayed, and after finding that it contained eight dollars per ton in silver, decided to build a smelter to obtain the more easily transported silver. They constructed a small stone smelter, but the results were disappointing. Instead of the liquid metal they hoped to produce, the process merely created colorful rainbows over the blast which represented the zinc going off in fumes. Discouraged but not ready to quit, Wolfer held onto his claim for a few years then sold it to George W. Chase from Fayetteville who organized the Morning Star Company in 1891 when he received the patent for the property. The company installed a larger smelter and additional machinery, and the well-established Morning Star Mine eventually became one of the largest producers of zinc in Arkansas.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the commencement of mining activities began very sporadically as interest in the new highland enterprise rose and fell along with the price of zinc. During the late 1880s,

however, the Rush Creek district became the subject of serious exploitation. Interest, for the time being, was centered in the area surrounding the mouth of Rush and Clabber creeks, which were within one half mile of one another. By 1889 two groups had established claims: the Buffalo Zinc and Copper Company and the Arkansas Mining and Investment Company. In early 1888 the former association founded at the mouth of Rush Creek the town of Exeter, complete with a two-story hotel, company stores, post office, and houses.¹⁷ The new town was named for the secretary of the company, Fred C. Exeter, and within a year three more nearby towns had been laid off by the county surveyor.¹⁸ Two hundred claims were recorded during 1887 and 1888 and the mouth of Rush Creek was organized into the Buffalo Mining District which adopted a seal appropriately displaying a bull buffalo.¹⁹ In January 1888 the first ore barge was floated down the river to Batesville.²⁰ By 1889 the Rush mining district had grown to sufficient proportions that it was profitable for Isaac Snyder to make a weekly trip from Yellville to sell goods from his meat shop.²¹ Yet the development of the 1880s was only the beginning.



Panther Creek Mine, Mill Shed, 1916 [Credit: Ardella Vaughan, Jasper, Arkansas]



Panther Creek Mine, Newton County, 1916 [Credit: Ardella Vaughan, Jasper, Arkansas]

The decade of the 1890s served to establish the foundation for the later "boom" during World War I and to advertise the zinc field to the nation's mining community. While interest vacillated, it was reported in 1899 that the influx of prospectors was so great that the surrounding agricultural region was having difficulties in providing enough sustenance.

There is absolutely no beef in that country. I ate salt pork from the time I went in there until I came away -- not a bite of fresh meat for anybody. Neither are there any chickens, eggs or butter. In fact, so many have gone there, and the facilities of the people already settled there are so limited that the latter have almost been eaten out of house and home by the prospectors, immigrants and strangers.²²

While the zinc field stretched across northern Arkansas, the center was the Buffalo basin. As a regional geologist noted,

"with the Buffalo Basin left out of the thing the mineral resources of North Arkansas would be very much like the play of Hamlet with Hamlet left out of the cast."²³ While the Rush Creek region marked the focal point of the Buffalo River zinc mining activity, other operations were being instituted in other areas of the watershed along Water and Tomahawk creeks in northern Searcy County and near the headwaters of the river close to Ponca and Boxley.²⁴

Although the miners in Newton and Searcy counties were burdened with hauling the ore by means of wagons over circuitous highland roads to the nearest railhead, most of the zinc removed from the mines on the lower Buffalo was transported to Batesville via ore barges. This increased activity on the river led inevitably to the prominence of Buffalo City as the center for supplying the Rush Creek and neighboring areas. Steamboats arrived at regular intervals bringing merchandise, machinery,²⁵ lumber, and various incidental supplies needed in the fields. The mining excitement was a boon to other industries as well. The lumber business experienced a rise in production as it sought to provide an endless supply of fuel for the smelters in various parts of the region.²⁶

One of the problems which constantly plagued the development of mining in the basin was transportation. By 1900 the entire Boston Mountain area had become an island surrounded on all sides by railroads. The inhabitants therein were forced to rely on the rough wagon roads which crossed and recrossed its rugged terrain.²⁷ As the turn of the century approached, however, the possibility of a railroad being built into the region engendered considerable excitement. Rumors and hearsay filled the newspapers as the mining establishment pinned its hopes on a more efficient and expedient means of transporting the ore. The expected railroad would be, according to the local journals, the salvation of the north Arkansas zinc field. Searcy County's Mountain Wave steadfastly maintained that "Searcy, Newton, Boone and Marion counties contain zinc, copper and lead enough to keep two or three railroads busy for a hundred years."²⁸ Within a year surveys were being conducted to ascertain the most practical path for the anticipated steel rails. Although one survey plotted a route directly through the Rush Creek district, a line to the southwest received final approval. between 1901 and 1903 the St. Louis and North Arkansas Railroad extended its lines, which already existed from Joplin, Missouri to Harrison, Arkansas, through the Buffalo River valley to Leslie in southeastern Searcy County. By 1909 the road had been continued from Leslie to Helena, Arkansas on the Mississippi River.²⁹

As the new tracks inched their way through the Boston Mountains and across the river, new towns sprang up and older ones, by-passed by the railroad, folded. Pindall in Searcy County developed after the entrance of the road as a siding for

shipments of ore from the nearby Big Hurricane Mine and quickly grew into a bustling village with five or six stores, a grist mill, school, and hotel. Although St. Joe had been founded around 1860, the coming of the railroad caused a new section to be added and dubbed New Town. A few miles south, the railroad passed the town of Duff by only a half mile, so the town relocated to a railroad construction camp called Gilbert, which was located directly on the Buffalo River a few miles to the south. Named for Charles W. Gilbert, later president of the railroad, the camp soon became a major departure point for investors and prospectors headed for the Rush Creek area, and at the same time became one of the major shipment locations for Buffalo River zinc.³⁰ A local resident later recalled that ore wagons often lined up two abreast for almost a mile waiting to unload.³¹



Morning Star Mine and Mill, Rush, 1904 [Credit: National Archives, U.S. Geological Survey, Professional Paper No. 24, Plate XXII]

The railroad was a tremendous boon to the long isolated people of the Buffalo River, but the population proved to be too sparse to enable the railroad to remain solvent. In 1906 the St. Louis and North Arkansas Railroad Company declared bankruptcy, and the newly organized Missouri and North Arkansas Railroad Company assumed operations. The M. & N. A. experienced similar problems, and six years later that company went into receivership, under which the railroad was operated until 1918 when the federal government took control of the line. Following the war the railroad was again managed privately but continued to have financial and administrative difficulties. After two and a half decades of marginal returns, the railroad was finally abandoned in 1946.³² The building of the railroad did not become, as expected, the panacea for the economic and transportation ills of the region.

The simple presence of the railroad within the Arkansas zinc and lead mining district did not lead to an immediate and ever-increasing production of ore. The amount of finished zinc produced in Arkansas in 1913 was roughly equivalent to that mined in 1907.³³ Because the output of the Rush mills alone accounted for approximately 50 percent of the total production of the state, the figures for the state as a whole generally reflect the production of the north Arkansas mining region.³⁴

With the beginning of World War I, the demand for zinc revived the north Arkansas mining district and infused it with sorely needed capital. The year between 1914 and 1915 illustrates the change. Within a matter of a few months, thirty mines became nearly 100; production jumped from eight tons to 3,209. The value of the zinc increased over twelve-fold from \$62,016 to \$795,832.³⁵

With the prospect of success looming greater than ever, the mining district of Rush became the site of an immense immigration of prospectors and miners. Practically overnight Rush grew "from a sleepy village of a few hundred inhabitants to a thriving mining camp."³⁶ Estimates regarding the population of the small narrow valley reached as high as six thousand although the actual number was probably half that.³⁷ A "New Town" of Rush sprang up a little over a mile from the mouth of the creek, and the new arrivals quickly erected stores, hotels, pool halls, and a theater.³⁸

Because wood provided the universal source of fuel for the steam boilers of the smelters and for the heating of the homes and stores, the need for a constant supply of cordage constituted a singular logistics problem. An average mill consumed eight cords of wood per day during the winter, and there were at least seven mills operating in the Rush area during the height of the activity.³⁹ The inevitable result of such an insatiable demand for wood led to the denuding of the forest surrounding the Rush

Creek valley. Local farmers and woodcutters provided the bulk of the fuel wood under contract with the mine operators and the miners themselves for one dollar per cord plus fifteen cents per hundred weight hauling costs.⁴⁰ But hauling the wood on a regular schedule was directly related to the condition of the roads.

In 1916 a correspondent for the Engineering and Mining Journal made an investigative trip to Rush and found the access difficult at best.

To get to Rush I crossed Rush Creek 43 times and when not in the creek was on the worst road ever, the ground being hub-deep and frozen. A storm on the ocean was not a circumstance to a ride in the stage. I walked three of the 12 miles and would have been pleased to have walked more, but the darned creek kept getting in the way. To add to my discomfort, the temperature was 16 above and the breeze brisk. Rush is where wolves swoop down on the farmers raising pigs.⁴¹

A reliable source of fuel was not the only problem faced by the miners at Rush. Aside from the hazardous working conditions in and around the mines, the extremely crowded housing conditions and inadequate sanitary facilities led to epidemics of typhoid and related diseases. Fortunately for the Rush Creek miners there existed in the immediate area a number of fresh-water springs from which a constant supply of clear water could be obtained.⁴²

No sooner had the new mining camps been constructed and an extended period of prosperity been envisioned for the entire zinc and lead mining district, than the industry experienced a devastating and unexpected decline. After reaching peak production of zinc in 1916 and 1917 when Arkansas refined 6,815 and 6,691 tons respectively, the industry in 1918 produced only 951 tons, and by 1924 the total had fallen to 4. The plight of the companion lead industry was much the same. In 1917 Arkansas's lead production reached a high with 382 tons, but three years later the total output of the state had diminished to only 8 tons.⁴³

The immediate causes for the abrupt abatement of zinc and lead production were an unusual set of circumstances that could not have been foreseen. Initially, the high productivity through 1916 and 1917 led to a lowering of prices; at the same time higher production costs were necessary to refine the ore. In addition, an ever-increasing problem grew from the reduction of the labor force through the national draft. As the involvement of the United States in World War I increased, the demand for young men to serve in the armed forces grew proportionately. Consequently, the source of labor for the most physically taxing

of the mining jobs was reduced. The mines hired older men as replacements in order to continue operating. The resulting loss of efficiency led to additional production costs.⁴⁴ And finally, the end of the war signaled an end to all price agreements and cooperative arrangements between smelters and ore producers. The prewar system of unrestrained competition resumed.⁴⁵

The zinc and lead mining boom along the Buffalo had run its course. The swift decline of the industry signaled a sudden reversal of the economy of the region. As the main source of employment was withdrawn, the discouraged miners sought work elsewhere and local farmers, who had supplied labor as well as various goods and services, returned to their fields. By 1920 the end of mining manifested itself in a decline in the valley's population. Searcy County lost 15.9 percent of its citizens while Marion, slower to feel the pinch, lost only .5 percent. Newton County, which had the least extensive operations, continued to gain slightly. By 1930 the effect was glaringly apparent. Searcy County's population from 14,590 to 11,056, a decline of almost 25 percent, and Marion County suffered a loss of almost 13 percent. Newton County, which remained more agriculturally than mineralogically oriented, reported a population loss of only 5.7 percent.⁴⁶ Although a portion of the decrease must be attributable to postwar restlessness, clearly the sudden closing of the mines was responsible for a large portion of the decline. Whatever the reason for the abrupt drop in the population, the three counties never again contained the number of inhabitants they possessed during the decade from 1915 to 1925.

The decrease in prices during the last year of the war and the concurrent rise in production costs doubtless brought the mining industry of northern Arkansas to its knees. A somewhat less tangible element, however, also played a role. In 1900 Arkansas State Geologist, John C. Branner, observed that the lead and zinc region of Arkansas could never develop to its fullest potential until the rough mountain roads which connected the mines to the railroads were substantially improved. Even the introduction of railroad service into the area, he continued, would not measurably alleviate the situation unless the primitive mountain roads were completely renovated.⁴⁷

It would be difficult to determine the extent to which the lack of an adequate system of all-weather roads affected the operation of the mining industry. The decline of mining along the river was due to many interrelated factors and while a poor transportation system arguably affected the mining operation to a certain degree, it was not a major reason for the collapse. Other Ozark districts consistently out-produced the northern Arkansas fields. The southeastern Missouri mining region in particular, with a similar topography to that around Rush, was the largest single producer of zinc in the United States in 1914

and 1915 producing 38 and 36 percent of the country's total smelter production. The northern Arkansas fields, by comparison, produced less than 1 percent of the nation's output during the same years.⁴⁸ Clearly the success or failure of the Ozark zinc and lead mine fields was not dependent upon a highly refined system of highland roads.

Life along the Buffalo River quickly regained a semblance of its former tranquility. Farmers returned to their fields, businessmen either closed their doors or adjusted their affairs to meet a greatly diminished demand, and the inhabitants of the valley soon became more interested in the current price of corn and pork than in that of lead and zinc concentrates. And the earlier, less chaotic way of life returned. Highland life once more became one with the seasons. The mountain folk re-established, if indeed it had ever been abandoned, their dependency on the soil for their principal livelihood. Survival once again depended on the farmers' ability to eke out an existence from the none too productive soil rather than on a pay check from a mine bursar. The resulting high degree of self-reliance allowed the people of the Buffalo River country to weather the decade of the 1930s without much of the wrenching social and financial dislocation experienced by the rest of the nation.

Throughout the Great Depression the inhabitants of the valley and the surrounding area were able to rely on the products of their gardens and fields to tide them over the hard times. Indeed, the protected valleys along the Buffalo appeared to hold the answer to the gnawing problem of surviving the growing economic crisis. The decade of the 1920s had significantly reduced the population of the lower valley as former miners, farmers, and other like-minded individuals sought economic success in more promising locations. But with the onset of depressed times beginning in 1930, that situation for the northwest part of Arkansas was reversed. By 1940 all three Buffalo River counties reported population gains of between 3 and 8 percent. In addition, a concurrent increase in the number of farms occurred. Between the turn of the century and 1920 the number of farms had steadily increased. From 1920 to 1930 the number declined between 7 and 13 percent. During the next decade, however, the number of farms increased by an average of almost 4 percent.⁴⁹

The relatively isolated life style of the residents of the Buffalo River watershed became a sought after commodity during the 1930s as people returned to the Arkansas Ozarks in an attempt to elude the economic ills which beset the nation. The quest for economic independence was realized within the watershed, for at a time when many farmers were forfeiting their lands to mortgage and insurance companies, and either relocating or becoming tenant farmers, land along the Buffalo was predominately owned by those

who actually tilled the soil. In 1940 over half the farms in Arkansas were owned by someone other than the operator, but the tenancy rate in the highlands was significantly lower. Newton County reported a rate of only 27.4 percent while Searcy County ranked highest among the three with a tenancy rate of 33.1 percent. Both counties ranked among the lowest in the state.⁵⁰

Life along the river was not, however, without its hardships. The financial constriction felt by the country as a whole was experienced in northern Arkansas. The hillfolk welcomed the various relief programs instituted by the federal government. Perhaps the most serious difficulty faced by the inhabitants was an extended drought during the first several years of the depression. Crops either failed altogether or matured in very poor condition. In 1930 the Marion County Fair was cancelled because of the drought and the inferior quality of the crops.⁵¹ In Searcy County farmers were admonished to save their crop seeds as they were in short supply.⁵² To assist the distressed farmers, the State Relief Commission began, in 1932, to establish canning centers which provided a central location for the preservation of surplus crops for later consumption. By 1935 nearly every county in Arkansas had at least one such "canning kitchen," and Searcy County had three. Within three years of their inception the centers had provided the facilities for the canning of over twelve million cans of fruits, vegetables, and meats.⁵³

By the mid-mark of the decade, the rainfall returned to normal and one editor announced that "Prospects for the future are brighter."⁵⁴ Crop diversification became a requisite for the successful operation of a farm, and gardens helped supply an ever greater portion of the food quota. In 1936 the Marion County Agent projected that if a farmer owned two milk cows, a good brood sow, thirty laying hens, and a year round garden, life in the county would be without privation. Once the above had been provided, the agent admonished, then it was time to plan for a cash crop to supplement the income.⁵⁵ The ability to make a living from the earth thus allowed the valley inhabitants to survive the most oppressive of the depression years without excessive hardships.

Once the depression ended, however, and the country began mobilizing for World War II, the exodus from the valley resumed. Doubtless the war itself caused the relocation of many highland residents as young men found the slow pace of Ozark life tedious after being exposed to more urban centers in the United States and Europe. In addition, economic opportunities seemingly were endless in other parts of the country as the nation geared up for the conflict and then rode the crest of prosperity during the affluent 1950s. The temptation of pecuniary gain elsewhere in addition to increased association with the "outside world" was too great for large numbers of residents. Beginning in 1940 and

continuing through the 1960s, the population of the Buffalo River country declined at a considerable rate. Newton County experienced the most serious loss, 20.2 percent during the 1940s, while Searcy and Marion followed with 12.7 and 9. The subsequent decade was even more draining on the rapidly decreasing population. Losses during that period ranged from 31.3 percent in Newton County to 22.1 percent in Searcy County.⁵⁶ Emigration from the valley continued for several more decades, but stopped entirely during the 1970s when all three counties recorded population gains of from 14.4 (Searcy) to 61.9 (Marion) percent.⁵⁷

Today the area remains one of the least populated regions in the state. Newton County, with its steep bluffs and winding valleys, has the smallest population density in Arkansas: barely nine people per square mile.⁵⁸ The Buffalo River country, today as yesterday, is predominately an area of small farms. With the exception of the twentieth century modifications such as steel bridges, asphalt highways, and scattered modern buildings, the landscape of the valley in many corners of the watershed has not changed excessively since the turn of the century. The topography of the region prevents any major changes in the land use, and there is little to attract business and industry to an area which possesses the lowest per capita income in the state.⁵⁹

In recent years the most significant alteration in the area's quiet existence has been the acquisition by the federal government of the river itself as a scenic addition to the National Park Service. That occurrence, and the circumstances surrounding it, was met by the residents of the valley with mixed emotions.

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VI

"...let the River be."

With a few exceptions, the Buffalo River was never considered a navigable stream. Its flow was much too intermittent; its channel much too shallow. The river was more successful in providing power for numerous gristmills, although the periodic floods first mentioned by Timothy Flint in 1828 continued to make that enterprise tentative at best. Beginning just before the turn of the century, however, various proposals were made to dam the river, to harness and expand its supposed energy potential, and to enhance the possibilities of commercial traffic on the river.

As early as 1890 a geologist for the state of Arkansas noted that although the river contained "almost unlimited" water-power, controlling it would be most difficult due to the recurring floods.¹ Six years later, the Army Corps of Engineers conducted a survey to determine what modification of the stream would be necessary to enable it to carry regular freight service. The engineer in charge of the inspection concluded that the Buffalo could be made navigable at all stages of water by constructing a series of five locks and dams. The prohibitive expense, estimated at \$30,990 per mile, compelled the Corps to forgo the project and recommend a less costly dredging operation.²

In 1911 an Arkansas engineer suggested harnessing the stream near the mouth of Rush Creek in southern Marion County. At what is now termed Seven Mile Bend, W.N. Gladson proposed the construction not only of a twenty foot dam, but also of a half mile long tunnel through the hill around which the river wound. An estimated 225 horsepower would be produced by the dam and accompanying tunnel.³ The recommended construction never took place, and during subsequent years, as the population along the Buffalo began to dwindle, there seems to have been little interest in damming the river for any purpose.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, however, interest in controlling the Buffalo increased as public works teamed up with the development of hydroelectric power. The idea of creating thousands of jobs while providing needed electricity and flood control to rural areas of the country resulted in the construction of Boulder Dam on the Colorado and later in a massive project on the Tennessee. On May 18, 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the Tennessee Valley Authority Act which in part authorized the government to construct and operate a series of dams on the Tennessee River and its tributaries.⁴ The public response to this and other acts

prompted Congress to endorse additional projects.

The Rivers and Harbors acts of 1935 and 1936 authorized the "construction of certain public works on rivers and harbors for flood control, and for other purposes" and included a number of impoundments on the White River, but none on the Buffalo.⁵ The following year (1937) the Drainage Basin Committee, an independent governmental body, published its report on the White River which proposed a dam on the lower Buffalo. Lone Rock Dam, as it was named, was recommended for power development and for "some benefit to flood control."⁶ In addition, the committee placed on indeterminate classification the construction of two smaller dams on Rush and Mill creeks.⁷ Congress authorized the Lone Rock impoundment on June 28, 1938 with the Flood Control Act. That act placed the responsibility for the preparation of feasibility studies with the War Department; specifically with the Chief of Army Engineers.⁸ During the succeeding year the Army Corps of Engineers recommended the construction of the Lone Rock Dam one mile from the mouth of the Buffalo at a cost of \$11,422,000.⁹

Actual construction of the dams was delayed, however, due to the need for additional studies, cost evaluations, and, most importantly, the beginning of World War II. Indeed, the idea was largely forgotten until 1954 when the Corps of Engineers recommended that not one but two dams be constructed on the river. It suggested that Lone Rock be built three and a half miles from the mouth, and that a second dam, Gilbert, be located almost sixty miles upstream near the town bearing the same name. The Corps of Engineers designed the pair to operate as a unit for flood control and for power production. The two dams would have the same storage capacity as the originally approved Lone Rock Dam, but the estimated federal expenditure had risen significantly. For Lone Rock, which would rise 230 feet above the stream bed, the Corps estimated the cost to be \$45,070,000, while the Gilbert structure, a slightly smaller dam at 218 feet, was projected to cost \$40,910,000. The Corps at the same time rejected a dam at Carver even farther up river in Newton County, as well as a series of low-head dams on the lower portion of the Buffalo.¹⁰ In July 1956 Congress incorporated the Corps' recommended Lone Rock and Gilbert dams into yet another Flood Control Bill and sent it to the President for approval.¹¹ On August 10, 1956 President Dwight D. Eisenhower vetoed H.R. 12080, not because he opposed development of the nation's water resources, but because he believed that sufficient care and planning had not gone into a large number of the suggested projects and that the states involved had not been given sufficient opportunity to review and comment on the recommendations.¹²

Congress persisted and in early 1957 passed the River and Harbor and Flood Control Bill.¹³ The bill included both projects

as they had been recommended by the Corps of Engineers in 1954. President Eisenhower again vetoed the bill. He listed as his major objections many of his previous arguments for disapproval, and, in addition, objected to a number of the proposed projects because of their apparent wastefulness and the fact that at least three had no economic justification.¹⁴ Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas denounced the President's action as "a most serious blow to the progress and the orderly development of the water resources, not only in Arkansas but in all the Nation."¹⁵

Arkansans, including those who lived along the river, generally approved of the dams as a beneficial progressive undertaking. The need for flood control seemed obvious, and while the projected hydroelectric plants would have produced much more power than the immediate area could absorb, their construction was considered far more positive than negative. Prior to the 1950s there was little or no opposition to the placing of dams across the river. During the latter part of that decade, however, public awareness of the beauty and grandeur the Buffalo had to offer began to mount.¹⁶ And opponents of plans to dam the river began to unite and propose alternatives to inundation.

On January 4, 1961 Arkansas' Representative from the Third Congressional District, James W. Trimble, introduced H.R. 1839 which provided for the development of hydroelectric power and flood control within the White River basin, which included the Lone Rock and Gilbert dams on the Buffalo.¹⁷ Trimble's action prompted conservationists from around the state to organize the Arkansas Nature Conservancy, which espoused the twin goals of acquiring the Lost Valley area on the upper Buffalo and of creating "a national park on the upper and middle reaches of the Buffalo River." Elected officials included S.C. Dellinger from the University of Arkansas as President, Dr. Neil Compton from Bentonville as Vice President, and Mrs. Laird Archer from Fayetteville as Secretary.¹⁸ Of primary importance to these foes of dams on the Buffalo was the support of Arkansas' congressmen.

A major step toward the preservation of the river came during the summer of 1961 when Mrs. Archer wrote her long-time friend Senator Fulbright about the possibility of establishing a national park on the Buffalo. Fulbright, apparently having lost his earlier enthusiasm for dams, quickly responded that he was "very interested in getting the Buffalo River included in the National Park System" and intended to obtain an "appropriation which would finance a survey by the National Park Service of this area."¹⁹ The following October a Park Service team inspected the river and concluded that it qualified for inclusion into the National Park System.²⁰ Thus by the end of 1961 two governmental agencies found themselves diametrically opposed on the issue of damming the Buffalo. The Corps of Engineers and Representative Trimble advocated the construction of both Lone Rock and Gilbert

dams while the National Park Service, local conservation groups, and Senator Fulbright were opposed. That basic alignment, although later augmented by the addition of interest groups on both sides, remained throughout the ten-year struggle over the future of the Buffalo.

Local proponents of the two dams also realized that organization was a necessity and during early 1962 formed the Buffalo River Improvement Association (BRIA). Made up of business and commercial interests in Marshall, Searcy County, and led by James Tudor, the local newspaper editor, and Gibson Walsh, the owner of an abstract company, the BRIA argued that "spiritual and intellectual freedom can only exist where there is economic growth," and the dams, it asserted, would furnish the necessary growth.²¹ Shortly after the establishment of the organization, the Marshall group published The Truth About the Buffalo River, a pamphlet which further explained its position. The small treatise argued that the construction of Lone Rock and Gilbert dams would result in the development of needed electrical power, in soil and water conservation, in the encouragement of industry and tourism, and in a corresponding higher standard of living. The tract also considered the possibility of a national park, but only for the area upstream from the proposed Gilbert reservoir.²² It suggested that the Buffalo could accommodate both propositions: a national park on the upper reaches of the river and dams and reservoirs on the middle and lower portions of the stream. But half a river was not enough for the opponents of the dams.

A public hearing called by the Corps of Engineers in Marshall on January 30, 1962 marked the first meeting between the antagonists in the struggle and the outcome resulted unquestionably in a victory for the local pro-dam forces. Dr. Neil Compton who attended the meeting on behalf of preservation interests later remarked that "we were definitely impressed by the thorough-going efforts of the people in the Buffalo River Improvement Association."²³ The encounter in Marshall, while a victory for the BRIA, had the more important effect of stirring the conservation faction into greater action.

Two events during the spring of that year significantly advanced the conservationists' cause. In April, United States Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas floated the Buffalo for several days with an entourage of dam opponents. Douglas, an avid outdoorsman and lone-time conservationist, enthusiastically favored preservation of the river under the protection of the National Park Service. He strongly believed that in the near future additional recreational facilities would increasingly be needed. "Today, we work a 40-hour week," the Associate Justice remarked after his float. "In the next generation it will be down to a four-day week. The people of America will need something besides beer and television."²⁴ The media coverage of

the visit helped to advertise the plight of the Buffalo and solicit support from conservation-minded individuals and groups in Arkansas and in neighboring states.

The following month preservation proponents, buoyed by the Douglas trip and aware of the strength of the BRIA, gathered on the campus of the University of Arkansas and on May 24 established the Ozark Society with Dr. Compton and Mrs. Laird Archer, both from the Arkansas Nature Conservancy, as President and Secretary. The Society pledged as its immediate objective "the preservation of the Buffalo River and adjacent areas in their natural state," and stated that its long term goal was the promotion of the knowledge and enjoyment of the Ozark-Ouachita mountain region.²⁵

While the Ozark Society was being formed in Fayetteville, another anti-dam group, the Searcy County Farmers Association (a title later changed to the Buffalo River Landowners' Association), was being organized. That body consisted of property owners along the river in Searcy County, many of whom possessed land that would be inundated if the Gilbert dam were constructed.²⁶ Unlike the Ozark Society, the Landowners' Association was less than enthusiastic about the possible inclusion of the stream into the National Park System. The landowners were more interested in continuing as they always had rather than opting for either of what they considered extreme alternatives.

By early 1963 the National Park Service had evaluated its field work and announced it was recommending that the Buffalo be designated a National River. The damming of the river, according to the Park Service report, would so change the character of the Buffalo that it would no longer be of national significance as a free-flowing river. The report was emphatic: "Here lies the last opportunity for preservation of a river typical of the Arkansas Ozarks, and, indeed, the opportunity for preservation of a river considered by many to be the most outstanding free-flowing stream in the Southwest."²⁷ Thus the National Park Service entered the fray -- not as an observer with only secondary interests, but directly, as a participant, with a vested interest in preserving a portion of the nation's scenic beauty for future generations.

Following the official decision of the Park Service to seek inclusion of the river into its system, the cause of the Ozark Society and the other conservationists was greatly heightened. Additional support emerged from the media as articles in state and national periodicals and newspapers appeared, and interested individuals pledged their favor if not their direct assistance.²⁸ In May 1964 Dr. Compton received a conservation award from American Motors Corporation for his efforts in protecting the Buffalo. The Buffalo River Landowners' Association could claim 365 members by the later part of that year.²⁹ But the permanent

preservation of the river was far from an accomplished reality.

Support for the dams was still vigorous, enthusiastic, and substantial. On November 18, 1964 the second local hearing for the two dams took place in Marshall. The Ozark Society attempted to obtain a court restraining order to postpone the hearing on the basis that it had been denied information by the Corps of Engineers, but the plea was denied and the hearing was held as scheduled.³⁰ The gathering was similar in many respects to the earlier one held in January of 1962. There emerged a solid phalanx of support for the dams by the local populace, and the pro-dam advocates again made an impressive showing. A significance difference, nevertheless, became patently evident. Opposition to the dam proposal had grown substantially since the previous hearing. Two organizations, the Ozark Society and the Buffalo River Landowners' Association, had been formed with the explicit purpose of thwarting the impoundments, and both made their intentions known.³¹ In addition, Assistant Director Jackson E. Price represented the National Park Service and emphatically asserted that the "Corps' announced plan is not compatible with the Buffalo National River" proposal and that the Park Service adamantly opposed any impoundments on the river.³²

Price and the organizations opposed to the dams were supported by a large number of private citizens who were unable to attend, but who sent statements to be included in the official record of the meeting. Outstanding among those who voiced their opinions in absentia was the Missouri artist Thomas Hart Benton, who, long acquainted with the Buffalo, implored the Corps to "let the River be."³³ The hearing ended in a stalemate. The distance between those for and those against the dams remained unchanged. And Congress, keenly aware of the seemingly irreconcilable philosophical differences between the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Park Service and the similar division between Fulbright and Trimble, postponed any action.³⁴

The month after the hearing at Marshall, the Corps of Engineers published its comprehensive study of the Buffalo River basin in which it recommended that the dam at Lone Rock be de-authorized, but at the same time emphasized the need for a single large dam at the Gilbert site. The engineer in charge of the study observed that a "multi-purpose dam and reservoir at the Gilbert site on the Buffalo River will provide a practical and economical means of conserving and developing the water and related resources of the Buffalo River Basin...."³⁵ The estimated initial cost of the Gilbert project would be \$55,300,000, and the Corps estimated that it would require \$380,000 annually for operating expenses.³⁶

During the months that followed the release of the Corps' latest proposal, both local and national newspapers and magazines published articles in support of the preservation of the river.³⁷

Then in the April 1965 issue of Outdoor Life appeared an article by Hank Bradshaw which appealed directly to its readers to support the Ozark Society in its battle with the Corps of Engineers.³⁸ The plea brought responses from as far away as California and Pennsylvania; all offering to make financial contributions, sign petitions, or write their congressmen.³⁹

Public concern for the plight of the Buffalo was growing apace, and the countless petitions, letters to politicians, and editorials were beginning to bear fruit. During the summer of 1965 the Lyndon Johnson administration decided to support the proposal to save the river, and, more important, the Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, while he had as yet made no official statement on the issue, endorsed the national river idea in letters to constituents.⁴⁰ By December the governor's position had solidified considerably. On December 10 Faubus sent a letter to the Chief of the Army Engineers, William F. Cassidy, in which he formally declared himself opposed to the Gilbert (or any other dam on the Buffalo) and admitted he was strongly in favor of the national river proposal.⁴¹ The letter was perhaps the single most important aid the conservationists received in the lengthy battle to rescue the river. While the Corps of Engineers remained convinced the dam would benefit the people of the valley, it customarily did not recommend authorization for projects that were opposed by the governor of the state in which the projects were located. Thus in April, 1966 Lt. Gen. William Cassidy withdrew his recommendation for construction of both the Lone Rock and Gilbert dams.⁴²

Preservation forces had gained valuable time. But as long as the river was not protected by the National Park Service, or in some other manner, the possibility remained that changing political conditions could lead to the resurrection of the proposal to dam the river. In addition, Congressman Trimble, following the withdrawal of the proposal by Cassidy, vowed to "do all that I can to get it [the Gilbert dam] authorized."⁴³ The upcoming election became crucially important to both sides.

The fate of the Buffalo emerged as an important issue in the race for the Third Congressional District. The results revealed that the tide had turned. James Trimble lost in two out of the three Buffalo River counties and consequently lost his seat in Congress to Republican John Paul Hammerschmidt from Harrison. Only in Newton County did Trimble win and there only by 123 votes.⁴⁴ The defeat of Trimble was significant. He was the only Arkansas congressman unalterably dedicated to the damming of the river. With his removal from office, the pro-dam forces lost much of their momentum, and positive steps toward creation of the Buffalo National River began.

On January 30, 1967 Senator Fulbright introduced a bill that provided for federal ownership and administration of the river.

Representative Hammerschmidt proposed a similar bill in the House of Representatives five weeks later.⁴⁵ Because of a crowded legislative calendar, however, Congress, increasingly consumed with the war in Viet Nam, took no substantive action until 1971.⁴⁶ During that year the Senate passed its version of the national river bill and the House, moving more cautiously, conducted public hearings late in October before its Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation.⁴⁷

The subcommittee hearings revealed to Congress what had been known locally since the beginning of the struggle: residents along the Buffalo strongly opposed the taking of their land by the federal government either for Corps of Engineers's dams or for preservation under the National Park Service. As the dam proposal was shelved in favor of the park idea, a noticeable shift in opposition occurred. The Buffalo River Landowners' Association that had opposed the dams was located largely in Searcy County and consisted of farmers who feared the loss of their farms, but who lived away from the river. With the increase in National Park Service involvement, opposition shifted upriver to Newton County where the landowners resisted removal from the homes which were located immediately adjacent to the river. These long-time residents of the valley founded the Buffalo River Conservation and Recreation Council which opposed the taking of their property on constitutional grounds.⁴⁸

Buffalo River inhabitants traveled to Washington for the hearings and made their sentiments known through letters. Almost to a person they opposed the takeover of the Buffalo by the federal government. Their contention was basic: personal rights and county economics. A Newton County resident concisely expressed the basis for the landowners' opposition.

The landowners along the Buffalo River in Newton County, Arkansas do not oppose keeping the Buffalo River in its present state. They do oppose, and rightly so, those from outside the area and those within the federal government telling them what must be done with their lands.⁴⁹

In addition to their desire to retain their farms and homes, some of which had been in the same family for over a hundred years, the Buffalo River citizens, especially in Newton County, were concerned that their meager tax base would be eroded further. They had reason to be alarmed. In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt created the Ozark National Forest which eventually placed 195,638 Newton County acres under the jurisdiction of the National Forest Service. The removal from the tax rolls of land along the Buffalo would further reduce the taxable land in Newton County to less than 50 percent.⁵⁰ A county that already possessed one of the lowest per capita incomes in the state could ill afford, it was argued, to lose any more land to the

nontaxable federal government. Opposition to the national river idea was so pervasive that in 1968 citizens in Newton County voted by over 95 percent against it.⁵¹

Throughout its two days of deliberations, the subcommittee heard the impassioned pleas of local landowners to leave the river valley in private ownership, but it also heard equally compelling arguments in favor of the national river proposal. After weighing the alternatives, the subcommittee members reported favorably on the bill and on February 7, 1972 it was passed by the House.⁵² In less than a month, President Richard M. Nixon signed Public Law 92-237 "To provide for the establishment of the Buffalo National River."⁵³ Limited in size to 95,730 acres, the river would be preserved for future generations under the administration of the National Park Service.

Perhaps the outcome was inevitable. Local opposition to the creation of the Buffalo National River was considerable and determined, but almost entirely limited to the landowners along the river. The conservationists who advocated federal ownership not only wielded more influence through sheer weight of numbers, but also could rely on the disciplined organization of a large number of established societies which were dedicated to the preservation of unique natural areas throughout the United States. Those who opposed the establishment of a federally owned river were simply outnumbered.

The land along the Buffalo River has thus come full circle. Originally owned by the federal government and offered for sale during the early years of the nineteenth century, it has now been reclaimed as another addition to the National Park System. The intervening years have brought a substantial amount of change to the small valley, and yet in many ways it has changed very little since the first white settler constructed a log cabin on the river's banks. The natural beauty enjoyed for generations by the inhabitants of the region remains intact despite the intense mining and lumbering activities of several decades. Where primitive wagon trails crossed the ridges, asphalt highways now speed visitors to and through the watershed. The former prevalence of the log cabin dwelling has been largely, although not entirely, replaced by modern frame structures with asbestos siding and asphalt roofs. In addition, there is an increasing incidence of vacation style cabins and mobile homes.

In the second half of the twentieth century change dramatically affected the built, as well as the cultural, environment of the Buffalo River valley. The improvement of roads, the construction of high, all-weather bridges, and the introduction of television altered the southern Ozarks in fundamental ways. But one can say the same about almost any other rural area in the United States. The hillfolk studied by

Vance Randolph arguably existed and individually lead "simple lives, without any modern gadgets." Whether they collectively formed a distinct "mountain culture" or simply constituted less progressive elements of a rural society exacerbated by a highly contorted terrain is questionable. In the absence of super-highways and urban sprawl, the Ozarks will always appear to change at a slower rate. And within the Ozarks the pace will vary as it does today from Marshall to Snowball and Harrison to Boxley.

Throughout whatever change comes to the Arkansas Ozarks, the Buffalo River will continue as it has for a century and a half to comfort its neighbors and enchant its visitors. Dynamic and static, serene and violent, the river flows with a reassuring inevitability evoking rich images of a pastoral yesterday while holding the promise of a familiar tomorrow.

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